The Methods of Mr. Ames

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THE METHODS OF MR. AMES

BY FREDERIC CARREL

JOHN JOHNS
AN EDUCATION
THE CITY
THE PROGRESS OF PAULINE KESSLER
THE REALIZATION OF JUSTUS MORAN
HOUSES OF IGNORANCE
MARCUS AND FAUSTINA

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I

The shriek of the steam syren announced the entrance of the Channel steamer into Dover harbour as Ames stood upon the deck amid a crowd of passengers. This, then, was England, the land which he had quitted as a boy, and which, as a man, he had come to seek again.

The spring sun shone through a whisk of cloud on the high stone pier, but the sky, Ames thought, was pale, contrasting badly with the firmament of Florence, which he had left three days before.

No matter, this was the land where he was born. It was here that a new era of his life was to begin, where the passage from poverty to wealth was destined to be made, if the prospects which had been held out to him were true. As the vessel stopped, he moved with the crowd of passengers towards the exit. Landing presently, he passed into the station, and after a short halt at the Customs took a seat in the London train.

From the carriage window, at the beginning of the journey, he observed the scene. The harsh slate roofs and the uniformity of the red-brick houses, the mist of coal smoke which hovered round the outskirts of the town, then the bright green meadows and the foliage of the trees and hedges, revived memories which were almost lost. The same aspect of the

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outer world had met his gaze when as a boy he had left with his widowed mother flying from poverty at home. His boyhood had been passed in the clement atmosphere of Florence, and when he had left the University of Rome, equipped with the knowledge which it had to give, he had drifted into art, for which he had an aptitude. He was thinking of devoting himself to it entirely when two events, one following hard upon the other, had turned his footsteps towards England. Throughout their exile, while they were living in a state approaching want, his mother had maintained that one day they would be affluent, and that all the stings of poverty would be removed. But he had scarcely heeded her, thinking that the contingency on which she based her hopes was too remote to be worth considering. And yet that contingency, it seemed, had turned into a reality. A railway accident had killed a father and a son, and two days after his mother's death he had been made aware that he was the next-of-kin. At first he had scarcely credited the news, thinking his uncle in Australia, from whom he never heard, almost mythical. But the letters from the solicitors were so definite and categorical, that at length he had resolved to come.

The life of straitened means which he had led in Florence, the limitations of desire which it imposed, the humiliations which he had suffered, and his temperamental love of elegance, all made him realise how great a change in the scope of his existence would come about if the fortune, as to which the lawyers wrote, were his. Society, which had frowned on him so long, would smile upon him now, perhaps.

The train reached the outskirts of the metropolis, and Ames gazed with wonder at the field of roofs and chimney tops which form the sad approach to Charing Cross. Then he closed his eyes until the train had reached the station.

At first he had been undecided as to the choice of a hotel. He had heard that London now possessed inns of great magnificence, but he thought it wiser, until his position was assured, to select a small hotel in Jermyn Street which he knew.

Accordingly, as soon as he had gone through the ordeal of the luggage, he took a cab. The aspect of London in that quarter of the capital is sufficiently imposing, and Ames looked at the series of Doric or Corinthian temples of the clubs with a certain admiration. He noticed further on the fulness of the thoroughfares, and the lively pace at which the people walked.

There was plenty of vitality, he thought, in a race that walked so fast, and he wondered that he was not more in sympathy with this activity. It must be, he concluded, that the life of Italy had modified his natural proclivities, and that was also why he felt somewhat a stranger in his native land. No matter, he would adapt himself to English life, no doubt, and if he could not, well then he would depart.

The cab stopped at the hotel, and it was not long before he had been given a comfortable room looking out upon the quiet street. He retired early, and when he woke the next morning the sun was shining, illumining the smoke-grimed walls of the houses opposite. He took this as a good omen, and dressed with a feeling of expectancy.

He opened his window, and the air was fresh and stimulating. Glistening hansoms with rubbered wheels glided swiftly, almost silently, along. The passers on the pavement walked with an air of strength and capability. This was a city of many possibilities, and he hurried down to breakfast so that he might lose no time in becoming acquainted with it.

The office of the solicitors was in Chancery Lane, and as it was still early he set out on foot for his destination, after inquiring the road he should take. As a boy, he had visited London once or twice, and as soon as he found himself in Trafalgar Square he felt that he was upon known ground. If the streets had seemed thronged the night before, they seemed invaded now. Truly this was a busy place. Passing along the narrow Strand, noticing the strange disharmonies of divergent architectures, and the presence of the old at the side of the new, he reached the blackening pile of the Tudoresque Law Courts, observing with a smile the obstruction which obscured their view. Reaching the narrow lane in which the lawyers carry on their trade, he found the number readily. Winston & Morris was written large upon a brass plate of the ground-floor office which he entered. He asked a clerk whose head appeared at an open wicket if he could see either of the partners. He was eyed suspiciously at first and asked if he had made a previous appointment. But when he announced his name the clerk at once descended from his stool, and with an air of excessive deference opened the door of an inner room, in which he requested him to wait a moment. Mr. Winston would receive him soon. And while he waited, seated in a low arm-chair in a small room lined with deed-boxes, he could hear the clerks discussing something in low tones. Once he caught the words: "I should like to be in *his* shoes," and, presuming that they related to himself, he concluded that he must be held to be in a fortunate position. So much the better if it was so, but he was quite determined that he would not allow his pulse to beat one second faster than its wont. If wealth was his, he would accept the life which it afforded. If not, then, without regret, he would continue his career.

Presently the clerk reappeared and, with the same deference which he had shown at first, requested him to step into the adjoining room. Here he found a man of fifty with a shaven, legal face and keen, grey eyes which scrutinised him keenly, but approvingly.

"You've come at last, Mr. Ames," he said. "I have seldom seen an heir so unconcerned."

Ames smiled, and Winston added:

"Since my last letter the whole affair has been completed. On the smallest computation, the fortune of your uncle amounts to close upon eight hundred thousand pounds!"

Unmoved, Ames said:

"And is it genuine?"

"Oh, absolutely; the bulk is in Colonial Stock."

"Then I must consider myself as rich?"

"Oh, very affluent indeed. You are distinctly to be envied."

Then he explained to Ames that not only was the fortune in Colonial Bonds, but that the bulk of it was lodged in London, so that all that was required to send him into possession was his signature to sundry deeds and the receipt of a reply from Melbourne, which would probably come in about a month. In the meantime he would be happy to act as Ames' banker. A clerk was called and Ames signed a number of documents and papers.

Then Winston asked:

"For how much shall I have you a cheque made out?"

But Ames had a profound dislike to borrow.

"I am not in need of money now."

"As you like, of course. But tell me, do you know many people here?"

"Our friends in London all deserted us because we were so poor."

"Oh, they'll be delighted to receive you now."

"Indeed?"

"You will want a club. Shall I put you up for mine?"

"Thank you exceedingly. Not yet."

Winston could not suppress a cough of slight impatience.

"We have a fair share of the peerage."

But Ames was silent. Why should he give reasons? He had done so long enough, and since this power was his, it amused and pleased him to exercise it now. For the rest, he must be better informed than he was before taking steps in his new career.

This closed the interview. Ames, after promising to call in a week for some additional formalities, withdrew. When he found himself in the street again, he felt surprised that he was not conscious of more joy. True, he experienced a comfortable feeling of assured existence, and many plans of pleasurable life suggested themselves to him as if competing for adoption. Nevertheless, there was no exuberance, and he concluded that if this was the case it must be either that there was something in the atmosphere that calmed emotion, or else that the effect of early disappointment had been to deaden enthusiasm in his nature. He looked at the passers in the street, wondering if they would have felt different in his position, what any of those busy men who seemed so eagerly engaged in the struggle for the daily bread would have done if he had found himself, as the clerk expressed it, in his shoes. Some, perhaps, would have gone mad, others would have at once indulged in all the pleasures which they had been hitherto denied, rushed round the country in a motor car, gambled, or founded a museum to perpetuate their name, or done a hundred other partly wise and partly foolish things. And no doubt a little later on he would also do some semi-wise and semi-foolish things since life was an alternation of wisdom and of folly. But for the moment he wanted to do no more than observe, so that he might discover the course to take that led directly and securely to the end for which men seemed to him to live, for power. With the greatest wealth, he knew, there might be unhappiness if the possessor did not act astutely or with what the Machiavellian ethics (with which one of his professors had almost secretly imbued him) termed *virtù*. Yes, in this age, as in that of Machiavelli, a man must have that peculiar combination of astuteness, nerve strength, patience, and determination which was called *virtù*. And he was well resolved that, as far as in him lay, he would display that quality.

He walked along, looking around with what seemed to him an increasing interest in men and things, realising that now that he was privileged to be a spectator in the theatre of existence, freed from the necessity of toil, there was an interest in life of a kind which he had not previously experienced. The anxiety of sustenance had been removed. All these people whom he met looked more or less careworn. For many of them, no doubt, the daily wage was hard to earn and worry was their lot. Well, he was relieved of that, and if he failed to make life yield its best, he would only have himself to blame.

It was nearly one o'clock before he found himself at Charing Cross again, and as he was feeling somewhat hungry, he entered the nearest hotel, which happened to be the "Grand," and lunched.

Then, as he had a plan for the afternoon and wanted to execute it, he sauntered back to his hotel, went up to his room, and drew from his valise a slip of paper on which were written a few names and addresses. These were the people whom his mother used to know and of whom he had vaguely heard from time to time in Florence. He gazed at the little list and wondered whether the persons named in it existed still, and, if so, whether they were to be found at the same addresses now. They were people of substance, he remembered, and it was likely that they had not changed their residences. He had found most of them in the Court Directory the night before; but as the volume was three years old it was clearly unreliable. Anyway, it would not take long to ascertain.

As it was still early, he spent an hour reading the papers which he had bought upon the way, admiring the skill which those of rival politics displayed in welding facts into harmony with each of their political contentions. What curious minds these writers must possess, he thought, since they could twist the truth so skilfully to suit their ends! In one paper the virtue of the Government was praised in terms that could scarcely fail to rouse a generous enthusiasm in the reader's breast. In another, the same Government was proved to be a body of incapables, guided by no good motives. Which was right? One or neither? He had neglected English politics abroad, but he promised himself that he would lose no time in studying their trend.

When he had finished his reflections he left his room, went out, and hailing a hansom, ordered the driver to take him to the first address upon his list.

This was a house in Eaton Square, high-porticoed, imposing. He rang the bell and asked if Mrs. Penton was at home. The servant thought she was engaged, but after inquiring his name he showed him into a room on the ground floor, furnished as a library. Here Ames waited half an hour, reading the titles of the volumes on the shelves, historical and sporting, gazing at the mezzotints which hung upon the walls, and at length, when he had begun to think that he had been forgotten, and was in the act of going out, the butler appeared again and requested him to follow him upstairs. In the handsome drawing-room into which he was shown, some twenty persons of both sexes, seated at little tables, were playing cards. No one looked up as he entered, but presently from the farther window corner an elderly man advanced.

"You are the son of Mrs. Mary Ames?"

Ames assented, and Penton, scrutinising him, led him to a recess at the end of the room farthest from the card-tables and asked him to sit down.

"It's a great many years since I saw your mother, who left England, if I remember rightly, after your father's death when you were quite a boy. And how and where is your mother now?"

"My mother died at Florence a few months ago."

"Indeed," said Penton, with feigned concern. "I'm sorry to hear it."

He added in a half-suspicious tone:

"You were educated, I suppose, in Italy?"

"Yes, in Italy."

"And what are you doing now?"

"Hitherto I've studied art."

"Art!" Penton repeated in a tone of something like deprecation. "And is that what has brought you here?"

"I've come on business."

"And where are you staying?"

"At James's Hotel in Jermyn Street."

"Oh," said Penton in a tone which seemed to denote ignorance of the status of the establishment which Ames had named.

For a moment Penton reflected, and, while he was doing so, Ames observed him closely, noticing that his hair and his moustache were black, although he knew that he must be sixty; that his face, though puffed somewhat unhealthily, was free from wrinkles; that his figure was so faultless that he seemed to be wearing stays.

Penton said at length:

"We have a bridge party here this afternoon, as you perceive, and so I'm not quite free. I suppose you do not play?"

This was said in a tone which conveyed the impression to Ames that Penton was extremely doubtful whether his means permitted him to play. He added loftily:

"We play for guineas."

But just as Ames was declaring his ignorance of bridge, a game ended and the players rose.

Penton made a sign to one of them, a tall, dark, handsome girl, to come to him.

"This is Mr. Ames," he said to her, "of whose mother you have sometimes heard me speak."

"Oh, yes, of course," the young girl said in a careless manner; "we must have met when we were small." Then, without waiting to say more or to hear more about the visitor, she was about to hurry away again, when something in Ames' physiognomy made her look at him a second time. Ames' face was worth a second look. Regular in feature, with dark waved hair, dark blue eyes, and a skin made brown by the sun of Italy, it was a face which could not pass unnoticed. For the rest, Ames was above the middle height, was well proportioned, and undoubtedly a type of manly beauty.

"Have you come to stay?" she asked.

"Perhaps."

She was about to say more, but a new table had been formed, and she was called to take a place at it.

"I am afraid they will be also wanting *me*," said Penton, "so I hope you will excuse me. You will generally find us in on Sunday afternoons."

This was said with an air of nonchalance, which Ames did not fail to notice, and with a simple "thank you" he took leave.

When he reached the street he hailed a hansom, gave to the driver the next address upon his list, and reflected upon the visit he had just made.

Evidently he was unwelcome, or only to be welcomed when it was ascertained what his circumstances were. Why did these people hold so much to wealth? Was it that they lacked it in spite of their apparent affluence, or was it that they shrank from poverty? Well, he would have time to ascertain.

The house at which he next alighted was in Cadogan Place, a house of moderate dimensions, though freshly painted and well kept.

A maid opened the door, and Ames inquired if Mrs. Beauchamp was at home.

Upon her reply in the affirmative, he gave his name and was shown up to the drawing-room.

Here, reclining on a sofa, he found a woman of thirty, dressed in black. In the half light of the curtained windows she appeared a handsome blonde, with a full and shapely figure.

She looked with some surprise at the unknown visitor, but as soon as he had described himself, she said: "Of course I know you. Please sit down. Your mother used to send me sweetmeats when I was a little girl at school."

Ames felt that his reception here was a little better than at the Pentons'. Perhaps he had lighted on a future friend, if friends existed still.

For a moment each surveyed the other. He asked at length: "Your husband?"

But she interrupted him: "My husband died two years ago."

He looked at her again, seeking a sign of sorrow on her face, but seeing none, he professed his ignorance of her bereavement, his regret.

They chatted. "And so you have come back," she said, "and now, no doubt, you won't return. You will take a flat in town."

He said: "Is that what you would counsel me to do?"

"Yes; there are some nice ones quite near here."

"Are they cheap or dear?"

"Oh, well, I suppose they're rather dear, but you won't mind that if they're really nice, I shouldn't think."

Ames could not repress a smile.

"I suppose," she said, "you haven't anything to do? No profession, nothing of that kind, I mean?"

Ames smiled again.

"No, nothing of that kind."

"Dear me," she said, with increasing interest, "how you resemble a portrait of your mother which we used to have at home!"

"And you," he answered, "how you resemble one of a Madonna in the gallery at Rome."

She laughed. "You have not seen me well."

But he shook his head. No, no, he was in earnest.

"Do you know," she said, "I think we're likely to be friends."

"*I* thought so from the first!"

Then, as if she had still a final hesitation, she inquired:

"And where are you staying now?"

He told her, and she said:

"I had a friend who stayed there also. It's a nice and quiet little place, I know."

Two ladies were announced—the Misses Norton-Young—and Ames observed them closely.

One, the elder, a handsome blonde, was a womanish girl of some few years less than thirty, with a whitened face and blue-grey languid eyes. The other, taller and slighter, was a dark-haired beauty five years younger, tall and well-proportioned. Both were dressed with taste, better than the widow, whose gown left much to be desired.

Ames was introduced, and when they heard that he came from Florence they professed to take a sudden interest in him.

"From Florence," said the elder. "I went there a few years ago, and I was so charmed that I wrote pages upon pages all about it till my editor would have no more."

"Mr. Ames," said the hostess, "is an artist." She hastened to add: "Not a professional, you know."

"We like artists," the younger said. "Melton Thomas is a friend of ours." As she spoke, Ames noticed an appearance of fatigue upon her face—the tired look of late hours and town life. They talked of art, and Ames discovered that both sisters had perceptions above the common level, that their conversation, though somewhat affected now and then, was on the whole intelligent. Nevertheless, they were a species of young girl which seemed to him apart. There was so little maidenly in their demeanour.

Mrs. Beauchamp said to the youngest suddenly:

"Sybil, you are not looking well to-day. I do believe you've been over-smoking."

Sybil shrugged her shoulders.

"A packet in four and twenty hours. Surely that's not much!"

But Mrs. Beauchamp shook her head.

"It would be far too much for me. What does your mother say?"

"Oh, mothers say nothing now, poor dears."

There was a laugh, and some fresh visitors arrived, and for some time Ames chatted with the sisters. Then he took leave. Sybil and her sister Maud left at the same time, and in the hall Sybil said:

"On Sundays we receive the unconventional at Pembridge Square. Will you not come?"

"Assuredly I will."

When he left the house he looked at his watch. It was only a few minutes after five, and as the next house on his list was in Kensington he jumped into another hansom. On the drive he thought of the people whom he had just seen. The sisters interested him, because they had not sought to know his means; but perhaps, when he came to know them better, their unconventionality would turn out to be spurious. Well, it would be amusing to find out; Sybil was undoubtedly nice-looking.

The house at which he next stopped was a large one at Queen's Gate. It was one at which he had often heard his mother say receptions were often held, where all the talent, all the wit and beauty that London had were to be met. It was a house he felt a certain curiosity to see.

He rang and asked a full-cheeked butler if Lady Smeaton was at home.

The man answered that her ladyship was in and asked him to enter a small reception-room on the ground floor, inquiring his name.

Thinking that his name might be mispronounced, Ames thought it better to adopt the Continental way, and gave his card. He was not kept waiting long. The butler came with an altered air and said: "Lady Smeaton is engaged, sir."

Ames repressed a smile and left.

They would not receive him, that was plain. The recollection of his father's ruin lingered still, and they did not even think it worth the trouble to inquire whether the son was in the same straits as the father. This was amusing and instructive. He wondered what their attitude would be when they learned the true state of affairs.

As it was too late to do more that afternoon, he strolled back to his hotel through Piccadilly, noticing the houses and wondering where he would pitch his tent.

Since his income was five-and-twenty-thousand, he could afford to choose a not too modest habitation, but he was quite resolved that, wherever it might be, it must be at some distance from the turmoil of the streets. In noise he could not think with all the clearness which was needful for success. Therefore, he must have a quiet residence. And, after all, he was not rich. There were many men in London who were far richer than he, and therefore he must not consider himself more powerful than in reality he was. Nevertheless, it was certain that he was superior in monetary strength to the majority of men.

When he reached the Circus, as it was still early, he wandered down Waterloo Place until he reached the Park, when his attention was attracted by a stately row of mansions. They pleased him, but unfortunately none of these houses seemed to be let. Perhaps, however, one might be for sale. This he would ascertain.

II

THREE weeks passed, during which Ames was busily engaged in making himself familiar with the topography of London and with its life, thinking it essential to his plan that he should be well acquainted with the place in which his youth seemed destined to be spent. He was also in negotiation for a house in Carlton Terrace. He paid no more visits, thinking that his first experience had shown him sufficiently conclusively that a man without a known position, or, in other words, an ascertained source of wealth, was little better than a cipher in the society which he had seen. Once or twice he had been tempted to call at the Norton-Youngs'; but reflection, and the perusal of a novel dealing with the manners of society, had convinced him that he would do better to postpone his visit until he was effectually placed upon the pedestal which fate or luck, or whatever agency controls the lot of men, had given him.

One day, as he was reading one of the journals devoted exclusively to society, he chanced upon a paragraph relating to himself. It ran:

"London society is about to gain a recruit of substance in the person of Mr. Ames, who, as next-of-kin, has succeeded to the estate of a relative in Melbourne, valued at a million. Mr. Ames, we understand, was educated in Italy, where he has resided until now."

A few days after this, and as a result of it, he thought, invitations began to pour upon him. Not only were there lying on his table letters from Mrs. Penton, the widow, and from Lady Smeaton (the latter excusing herself for having been unable to receive him when he called), but the remainder of his list of friends—those whom he had left uninvited—had written to him to tell of their joy at his return, although it was a mystery to him how they had discovered his address. Ha, ha! he was of sufficient interest for people to be at pains to find out where he lived!

Beside the letters on his table was the ground plan of the house he meant to buy and a letter from Winston informing him that all was ready for the final stage in his affairs, and, what was more, that gold had been discovered on the property. This might be only a mere spec, but the thing was worth investigation, and Ames thought, as he read the letter for the second time: "What if I were some day rich!"

As soon as the first moneys were paid into his bank Ames left his modest room in Jermyn Street and took a furnished flat in Whitehall Court while the mansion which he had acquired was being rapidly prepared. Then, when he had drawn up a scheme of furnishing in accordance with his taste, and with certain ends which he had in view, thinking that he was now upon a basis which would postulate him suitably, he went into the London world.

The first invitation he accepted was the Smeatons', because he argued that in an aristocratic country it was vitally important to make an entrance high up in the social scale. They had behaved to him like the egotists they were, but since they had made some sort of apology, and since they were needful to his social welfare, it would be unwise of him to keep away from them. Money certainly might do much, but perhaps there was still left some proper pride which not even money could offend without danger to that social favour without which the world, from a certain point of view, was a somewhat dreary place.

On the night of the Smeatons' dinner, therefore, he dressed with care, glancing at himself when he had finished in the long glass which stood in a corner of a bedroom hung with crimson silk, the bedroom of the owner, a luxurious *mondaine*, who had gone to Egypt to recruit her health.

A hansom took him to Queen's Gate, and as he ascended the steps of the portico a smile stole over his face—a smile of derision, not unmingled with contempt.

The same servant opened the door and silently admitted him, relieved him of his coat and hat, and led the way upstairs.

In a large drawing-room about a dozen people were assembled. Most of the ladies were seated on a wide settee, and most of the men stood talking to them. When Ames was announced there was a slight lull in the conversation and several glances were directed to the new arrival. It was evident that he was known and was expected, by others than the hosts, to be there that night. A man who appeared to be past the prime of life, followed by a woman who was considerably younger, advanced towards Ames. The host's face was neither more nor less distinguished than that of the average man of education. His figure was well preserved and his bearing dignified. His wife, who was superbly robed in roseate silk, struck Ames as being exceptionally handsome, although he was puzzled to account for her apparent youth, except on the hypothesis that she was a second wife.

It was the host spoke first.

"Delighted to see you, Mr. Ames. It is a real pleasure for me to welcome the son of my old friend."

This was said with the utmost cordiality, in a tone which offered recognition, patronage, encouragement. The hostess endorsed, with emphasis, her husband's welcome, looking at Ames with interest, inquiring how long he had been in England and expressing her pleasure that he had been able to be there that night.

Then she introduced him to the greater number of her guests, some of whom remembered his name, they said, and there were among them scientists and soldiers and leaders of society of whom he had often heard in Italy, so that he became aware that he was in an atmosphere of talent and celebrity. And among the ladies, the last to whom he was conducted, and whom he was asked to take into dinner, was, to his surprise, Lucy Penton.

"I need not introduce," the hostess said, and Ames had scarcely taken a seat at the side of the young girl when dinner was announced.

On the way downstairs Lucy Penton said:

"You only came to see us once!"

"But I have regretted ever since that I could not come again."

She said in a tone of consideration:

"Of course just now you must be very busy."

He looked at her as the strong light of a lamp at the foot of the staircase fell upon her, deciding that she was unquestionably fair.

"Yes, I am busy preparing to receive my friends."

"Somebody told me you had taken a large house."

"You shall judge of its size when you are my guest, as I hope you soon will be."

At table Ames was placed at the right of the hostess and opposite a man who he knew was a politician as soon as he heard his name.

The politician was saying to a pale-faced lady next to him who, Ames learned later, was a novelist:

"The question which you ask me is not difficult to answer. On our side is the greatest justice, and the greatest justice must prevail."

Lady Smeaton, hearing this, said:

"Mr. Stanley thinks that on the Radical side is the greatest virtue. What is your opinion, Mr. Ames?"

Thus appealed to, Ames replied:

"The greatest virtue seems to me to be upon the side of those who govern with the greatest skill, and the greatest skill in government appears to me to be the most masterly pursuit of the best ends."

The politician looked at Ames above his glasses.

"And which do you consider the best ends?"

The answer came at once:

"Those that are the best expression of the common will."

"That is a wide, an elastic principle."

Ames smiled. He had wished to abstain from propounding any definite doctrine and had used a phrase which seemed to him to suit all purposes.

The politician looked at him with a certain interest and Lady Smeaton said:

"You are an opportunist, Mr. Ames, I see."

And Ames contented himself with smiling once again. Then, not wishing to embark upon a further exposition of his views, he addressed Lucy Penton:

"You are not troubled by politics, I fancy."

"I know that we are Tories, and that's all."

"Why should you know more?"

"No; we women have other things to do?"

"You are busy brightening our lives!"

"I can see you come from Italy."

"Therefore, will you not excuse me?"

"I don't mind a bit. Englishmen, real Englishmen, I mean, so often think it beneath their dignity to say nice things. You—are so different."

Ames thought, "She tries to flatter," and replied:

"Nice things may be also true."

As the dinner progressed, Ames took a leading part in the conversation, and he noticed with amusement that his opinions were listened to with particular attention, although he felt quite sure that if any of the listeners had been accused of giving a special hearing to a rich man he would have displayed some virtuous indignation.

Even the hostess was at pains to be amiable to him, inquiring his tastes and excusing him from strict obedience to fashion whenever he seemed inclined to be independent. Golf and bridge appeared, however, to be obligatory, and Ames, knowing this, had already engaged two good professionals to teach him the secrets of the games, seeing that they were passports to social recognition. He did not know what riches a man must have to be released from the obligations they imposed; but it seemed to him they must be vastly greater than those which he possessed. Well, this was tyranny; but those who submitted patiently to tyranny could one day tyrannise themselves.

When the ladies left, Ames found himself still the object of attention. Lord Smeaton asked him for information as to places of resort in Italy, but as he inquired the conditions reigning in hotels of the first magnitude which Ames had never entered, Ames, for the first time in the evening, found himself somewhat at a loss for a reply. But his host smoothed the way for him. Of course as a resident he had not lived in the hotels, only in a villa, and when Ames thought of his little flat he could scarcely repress a smile. He gave an evasive answer, and turned the subject by asking Lord Smeaton if he yachted, guessing that the pastime might be beyond his means.

The answer was:

"No; do *you* intend to yacht?"

And Ames replied: "Oh, certainly."

And then the politician took an interest in him, inquiring of him if he intended to identify himself with any party, allowing him to understand that he would be happy to introduce him to the leaders of his own, and Ames answered that he would reflect, and, generally, Lord Smeaton advertised him to his guests so that by the time the smoke was ended he had become known to several important men.

And later, in the drawing-room, he was given much attention by the hostess, who spoke to him of functions in perspective and suggested to him the best course to pursue. And then Penton, from whom he had separated at dinner, came and took him into a corner of the room to ask him to have lunch with him next day to meet an ambassador, an honour which he declined.

And as the evening progressed, he spoke to many, and always he obtained the most encouraging *accueil*, so that when the evening ended he felt that it had been successful, as successful as it possibly could be.

The following week was occupied, almost entirely, in superintending the furnishing of his new abode, which, with the aid of a French artist, he was transforming into a home of many capabilities.

On the ground floor was the dining-room, a large room furnished massively in chiselled oak, and on the same floor a library, the shelves of which were filled exclusively with books of reference, lexicons and atlases, histories and manuals of science, so that the owner might at any time be quickly able to obtain sound knowledge, when in ignorance or doubt. But on the right, in the deep shadow of the curtained window, was a volume bound in red, in the centre of which was a small plate. This, when pressed, opened a door in the wall of books and admitted to a room furnished in Arab style, with wide divans in deep recesses half screened by Moorish work. In the centre of the marble floor stood an onyx fountain and round the room lay mats and prayer carpets of fine texture. As the room had been built out into the garden, the daylight entered it by a domed roof with stained-glass windows and arabesques. Around the base a skilfully intertwined inscription ran: "Say to the man who hath trouble that trouble doth not linger. Just as joy vanisheth, so vanisheth also sorrow." Around the room were octagonal inlaid tables and from the centre of the dome hung a large brass Moorish lamp. The only entrance to the room was through the bookcase door, but on one side of it, in the wall behind a gold embroidered hanging, was a door which led into a somewhat small but luxuriously furnished chamber. The room could be used as a studio by sliding away the red panels of the dome and admitting the light through the white glass behind it.

In addition to this, on the ground floor of the house, was a species of reception-room with a polished parquet floor, thickly curtained windows, and a few arm-chairs and sofas. On the first floor was the large, square drawing-room, on which the decorators, unrestricted as to cost, had lavished all their skill. Ames had not interfered with them in this, except in the choice of the Aubusson carpet; and the room was not only a model of First Empire furnishing, but, by the addition of cushions and knickknacks, it had been made to seem as though a woman had had a hand in its arrangement. Although it was a bachelor's, there was nothing in the room to indicate the fact.

On the next floor, to which access was obtained by an electric lift, was a bedroom almost equal in size to the drawing-room, and sumptuous with a carved oak bedstead, lounges, secretaires and presses. This room communicated with another which was fitted as a parlour, and was known as the red room by reason of the exclusive use of red which had been made in its decoration. It, in turn, communicated with another, called the blue room, painted and furnished entirely in blue, and each of these rooms had doors which opened on to the landing. On the floor above were a series of bedrooms and small sitting-rooms, and which in a sense constituted a separate flat.

They were designed for guest rooms, but Ames had by no means yet decided to devote them to his friends, especially as he had no intention of receiving visitors to stay. Above this were the servants' rooms, and a second studio built out upon the roof. Throughout the house the thickest felt had been placed beneath the carpets, so that the noise of footsteps was inaudible. Sand, also, had been laid between the floors, so that no sounds should pass from one room to another, and in order that no music should be heard from the adjoining house the wall of partition had at great expense been specially treated and prepared. From the other walls no such sounds could proceed, since the house was at the corner of the street. As far as is possible in London, silence was assured. The engagement of the servants was no easy matter. Ames wanted a good *chef*, but as all the best in London were retained he was obliged to content himself with the pupil of a " master," who was said to be a promising *vatel*. For his valet he engaged a Roman, the servant of an Italian count, who had lived some time in England, because he found him gifted with quick perceptions, and for the additional reason that he spoke both French and English well. He gave him high wages, but he warned him that he would expect from him unwavering fidelity and absolute discretion. For a time he hesitated as to whether he should engage a housekeeper, but on reflection he decided that the presence of an elderly and probably censorious female in the house would not be to his taste. The government of the household, he resolved, was to be entrusted to his secretary, who, however, was to dwell outside.

The choice of this secretary also gave him some little trouble. He had deemed that such a person was essential to his comfort to relieve him of nerve-impairing correspondence; and he knew quite well that, in the eyes of a reverential world, the possession of a private scribe would increase his prestige greatly.

An advertisement in *The Times* had brought him the usually large number of replies, from which he had selected six as worthy of attention; and on the day before he took up residence in Carlton Terrace he set aside the morning to receive the applicants. Some of these were too old, some too uncongenial, others were scarcely qualified, or possessed credentials which did not seem authentic, but the last to call was the man who appeared best fitted for the post.

As he came into the room, Ames scanned him narrowly. A thin though well-built man of some forty years, with grey eyes, a well-shaped forehead, and a face of the medallion type, his outward aspect was distinctly in his favour. He was dressed with neatness, also, and with a sobriety which was quite consistent with the post he sought.

Ames glanced from the credentials and diplomas which the applicant had handed silently to him, to the applicant himself, and *vice versa*, judging both. He said at length:

"You graduated in London, Mr. Sims; you have edited a paper, and are the author of a book, yet you seek the post of secretary to me. Pray, why?"

"The paper failed, the book was not successful."

"Could you not try again?"

"I cannot wait."

"You are engaged. The post is not one which demands much mental effort. But it requires tact. We shall see if you possess it. Good-bye, and come to me at Carlton Terrace at ten o'clock to-morrow." Ames waved his hand as a sign that the interview was over.

Sims withdrew with a pleased, thought somewhat puzzled, air, Now that his foot was, as he called it, in the stirrup, it was no part of Ames' intention to waste time. The season was advancing and there was yet much to do to make himself completely comfortable. Therefore, as soon as he had given a few indications of his habits to the servants, and especially to the cook, who spoke to him deferentially in the third person, and who showed him a packet of menus illustrative of his culinary skill, he sent a telegram accepting a very pressing invitation from the widow to dine with her that evening. After this he spent the remainder of the afternoon in a visit to his tailor and in buying some bronze ornaments which were needed, he considered, for the completion of his home.

Mrs. Beauchamp received him alone in a little boudoir adjoining the drawing-room in which he had seen her first, and it struck him, as he entered, that she and the little room were both draped in rose silk.

"You have come at last," she said. "I had almost begun to think it was a *parti pris!*"

He took a seat upon the sofa at her side, observing the elaborateness of her costume, the care with which her hair had been arranged.

"The only decision I had taken," he replied, "was to come to you as soon as I had a moment free."

"A moment free! As if a man like you is not the master of his time!"

"But I have, in a sense, been working, so that when you come to see me you should find my dwelling to your taste!"

She said in an admirative tone:

"I hear it is magnificent!"

Ames shook his head.

She said:

"I have no one to meet you. A young couple whom I think you would have liked just telephoned to say they cannot come. I *am* so sorry."

"But *I* am not sorry."

She gave him a side glance: "Why?"

"Because alone we can get to know each other better."

"Do you not know me yet?"

"Not yet."

"I'm not so enigmatic."

Ames thought: "That's true." He said:

"Are not all women enigmatic?"

"No, not to men like you."

"You credit me with too much penetration."

"There's penetration in your eyes."

Ames laughed.

"Eyes frequently deceive!"

The maid announced the dinner and they passed into the dining-room, in entering which Ames' attention was struck by a marble bust which stood upon a pedestal in the large bay window.

"Doubtless," he thought, "that noble Roman is her husband"; but he did not ask, thinking that she might talk too long upon the subject if it was once raised and having a dislike to listen to the conjugal reminiscences of widows.

They spoke of generalities at first, Ames wondering how long she would delay the attack which he felt was imminent.

She said at length:

"How happy you must be!"

"Happy?"

"With all that wealth! If I were rich, I feel that life would be a *fête*."

"It must be one already. You have good health, and, if I may say so—beauty. What more can a woman want?"

"A woman brought up as I have been requires two things—sympathy and a certain luxury—to relieve life of its stodginess!"

"Sympathy you cannot fail to have; luxury is certainly your due."

"How blandly you say that!"

Ames thought: "She would like me to say it *con amore*."

"I speak," he said, "with absolute conviction," which committed him to nothing.

The dinner was over.

"If you like," she said, "we'll have the coffee up there in my room."

They left the dining-room, and the coffee was served them in the small boudoir.

"I suppose," she said, as she leaned back on the couch, "the women are spoiling you already?"

He gazed at her.

"I should like to be spoiled by *you!*"

This pleased her, for she said in a softened tone:

"And I by you."

This was maladroit, for it brought back his instinctive caution, which under the influence of her attractions he had somewhat relaxed. She seemed to offer herself too openly to be taken, fed, pampered, and amused.

Nevertheless he said, with assumed enthusiasm:

"We have known each other such a little time, and yet I ask myself what is there that I would not do to make you happy."

Her eyes beamed, and he continued:

"When I first saw you I felt that we should be friends."

"Yes, friends," she said, with an air which seemed to say: "I should think we might be more."

"The time of my coming coincided so aptly with the period of your loneliness that it seemed as though fate had arranged it all."

A servant entered, handed a letter to her mistress, and withdrew. Mrs. Beauchamp glanced at the handwriting and turned pale.

"Will you excuse me?" she asked as she broke the seal.

The contents of the letter seemed to throw her into still greater perturbation, for she rose and went up to the mantel, against which she leaned, while the letter dropped from between her fingers.

"Why are you so silent?" he asked presently. "Have you had bad news?"

"Calamitous!"

"Will you not confide in me?"

She shook her head.

But he insisted:

"Tell me what trouble that bit of paper brings."

She took up the letter and handed it to him.

"I know I may have confidence in you."

He read the letter, which ran thus:

"MADAM,—On behalf of our clients, Messrs. Sims & Grove of Bond Street, we beg to inform you that unless their account for millinery, amounting to £134 18s. 3d., be settled before the end of the present week, we shall commence proceedings against you for recovery. Yours truly, WILCOX & BROWN."

Ames said: "If you will let me be your banker the little bill will be settled not later than to-morrow morn."

"Oh," she said, with unfeigned delight, "how kind, how truly kind of you! But could I, *how* could I accept? What would you think of me? What should I think of myself?"

"I should think of you as a friend whom it had been my good fortune to be able to assist, and you would think of yourself as a friend who was naturally entitled to the little service."

"Oh," she cried again, "you are so delicate, so generous. I feel I could almost kiss you."

He made a sign to her to resume her place upon the sofa, and when she had done so he said composedly:

"I pray you, do not restrain that happy inclination."

And after playing a moment's hesitation she kissed him on his cheek.

"What will you think of me?" she cried. "What *will* you think of me? I assure you I have always led a decent life!"

He smiled, computing the conflict of motives which she was then experiencing, perceiving how afraid she was lest she had spoiled her matrimonial chances by this monetary obligation.

What should he do with her? Make her his mistress, as it would be easy to do in her dependent state? No, no; that would commit him far too much. It was easy to form a tie of that description, but difficult to break it, and at the outset of his career the prospect of such a *liaison* did not seem to him attractive. To make her his wife never for a moment crossed his mind. From the matrimonial point of view, widows appeared to him too second-hand.

Thinking that he had been there long enough he rose, and as he did so a look of deep concern betrayed itself upon her face.

"You are not going?"

"Alas, I must."

"Someone awaits you?"

"Yes."

"Already!"

Ames burst out laughing.

"None of any consequence, but some letters of much."

"Is it true that you are going to stand for Shadley?"

"Perhaps."

"How I shall watch your progress! How I shall long to see you in!"

"If I succeed, my success will be in a large share due to your encouragement."

She sighed.

"I am never quite sure that you are in earnest."

There was so much sincerity in the tone in which she said this that Ames looked at her a moment with more consideration.

As though she had guessed that she had made a more favourable impression, she continued:

"Wait till you know me better. You will believe in me much more than you do now."

But Ames held out his hand.

"Good-night."

As she said good-night, she murmured: "It's only a loan, you know."

And he replied:

"It's whatever you wish that it should be!"

When he reached his flat, a friend was awaiting him, a young man of about his age whom he had known in Italy and whom he had met by accident in Piccadilly.

"Morgan, I'm glad to see you, but I'm busy. I must write letters, Morgan, in time for the midnight post."

"Oh, don't mind me. Of what importance is a man with nothing to do, and little to spend, out of whose meagre pittance the Government exacts its due."

"Certainly, Morgan, you'll never be of much importance if you talk like that. Why don't you marry and increase your wealth?"

"Where is the moneyed girl who would consent?"

"I shall look one out."

"Ames, you are a king. You can control the fate of others. Happy man!"

"You know the Pentons. What do you say to Lucy?"

"Not a penny of her own. All show."

"Well then, come to me a little later on."

"Ames, you would do me a great kindness. I don't want to spend my life in solitude. Yet the years are going and I find no mate."

But Ames had begun his correspondence and was scarcely listening. Presently the servant entered:

"A lady has come to see you, sir, and is waiting in the hall."

Ames rose and went out of the room, finding in the ante-chamber a heavily veiled lady in a black silk cloak. As soon as she lifted her veil he recognised the pretty features of an actress to whom he had been introduced a few days previously at an actors' club.

"You asked me to come and see you," she said, "and here I am. I'm rather late, but I could not leave the theatre sooner."

"Yes, yes," said Ames, "I remember well. I remember the talk we had and how much I enjoyed it. How good of you to come and see me, you, whose face must bring you numbers of intense admirers. But I am sad. I have a letter to compose which will keep me up all night. I cannot give you the—attention

—you deserve. In my room there is a man athirst for woman's sympathy. I shall introduce you and you will soon be friends."

But the lady became angry.

"Thanks, if you cannot spare the time I'll go. I can't think how I came."

Ames thought: "I can. You came because you heard of the dear legacy."

He took her arm.

"Do not oppose the way of things. Be reasonable, be sociable."

He led her, half pacified, into the room.

"Here, dear Morgan, is a lady of much charm. Miss Dora Devereux lives not far from you, and I beg that you will see her home. Good-night, good-night." So saying, he bowed them out.

When the door was closed he lit a cigarette and reflected for a few moments. He had resisted two temptations. Why? Because he had foreseen that if he yielded to the first he would be hampered, and secondly, because he desired to give himself a lesson in self-restraint.

And although he felt a vague sense of frustration, yet he was pleased with himself, thinking he had acted with *virtù*.

He spent two hours writing a letter to a Welshman in South Wales of whose skill as an election agent he had heard much praise, and when he had finished he went to bed and slept composedly.

The next morning he took up his residence at Carlton Terrace, and was in his study when his secretary arrived.

"Mr. Sims, here is a cheque which you will please cash at the bank. Then with the proceeds you will go and pay this bill."

He handed Sims Mrs. Beauchamp's bill and cheque.

"And mind, Mr. Sims, not a word of the source from whence the payment comes—not a syllable. But obtain a stamped receipt."

"Good," said Sims. "I shall carry out your instructions to the letter."

"That is as I like them carried out. And when you return you will write to the people on this list and invite them here to dinner on the twenty-fifth."

Sims took the list and placed it in his pocket.

"As soon as I return I shall attend to it."

Ames spent the morning roaming about his house, giving a final *coup d'œil* to the decorations, making, with the aid of the servants, some slight alterations. But when he had finished and sat down to lunch in his sumptuous dining-room, he could not help confessing to himself that he felt dull. The weather without was grey, the sky was a mere disc. It seemed as though a panoply hung over London. Ames was decidedly morose. But he reasoned with himself. What was a single day in the six-and-twenty thousand of which life was commonly composed? The next day would be better than the present one, perhaps, and if it was not, then one really must expect to suffer in a life which in the best of circumstances was undoubtedly a very imperfect state.

He had many projects, too, on hand, and they would take his thoughts away, he hoped, from the drabness of existence on such days as this. During the time that intervened before his dinner, he lunched much at clubs, was put down by Penton for his own, and while he was waiting to enter it, became a member of the Berkshire, which, in want of members, accepted him at once. And at length he decided he would visit the Norton-Youngs.

He found them at home on a Sunday afternoon, in the modest house in a *cul-de-sac* in Kensington. He was shown through the hall into a large room which, being on the level of the basement, was reached by a flight of stairs from the hall floor. The room resembled in some respects a studio. The rugs and divans were placed in irregular order. There were recesses and curtained nooks. An easel stood in one corner and in another a grand piano. There were tables with books and tea.

As he walked down the flight of stairs, Sybil, attired in a black gauze dress with short sleeves, showing her well-shaped arms, rose to greet him, followed by her sister Maud. They welcomed him as though he had been an old friend and introduced him to two visitors, a tall and broad-faced Irishman named Bryan, a dramatic critic, and a thin and pale-faced man of five-and-twenty, Arthur Bently, the famous drawer in black and white, whose art was, in Ames' opinion, of a degraded character. It was evident to Ames from the first that he was in a society of a somewhat latitudinarian class, where money was perhaps not quite everything, a society which valued talent most, and although he told himself that talent had its equivalent in money, and was often solely valued for the money it procured, still there was a difference between these people and some of those whom he had met of late.

All were smoking cigarettes, except Maud, who was smoking a short cigar while sipping a liqueur in a small red glass.

As she saw that Ames observed her, she said with a quiet smile:

"Don't be alarmed. It's a habit I acquired in Vienna."

Ames said:

"I am not alarmed. Cigars and cigarettes are made from the same plant."

Maud threw herself back on the divan and puffed, while Sybil observed Ames attentively.

The conversation which had been in progress when Ames entered was resumed.

Bryan was saying:

"No, there is a comical dearth of brains among the playwrights. For myself, I shall contract an illness if I have to sit out many of the dreary things they put before us now. I wonder that the public can be found to pay for seats."

The draughtsman said:

"It's wonderful."

"What do *you* think, Mr. Ames?" Maud asked.

"I think that the public being a product of the nation, just as is the dramatist, the one is suited to the other."

"That," said Sybil, "is severe on our British taste."

"British taste in some things is infallible," said Ames.

"But not in art?" asked Maud, with a heavy smile.

Ames, however, had suddenly become interested in a Persian cat who was displaying herself upon a rug, and he made no answer to the question.

"Is this gentleman not English?" inquired the artist with a frown.

"Oh, yes," said Sybil, "but Italianised."

"A beauty," Ames exclaimed to Maud, as he stroked the cat.

"Yes," she said. "I love him as my life!"

"A little more," the critic interposed, exchanging glances with the elder sister.

Ames turned from the cat and sat back in his chair, observing Maud and Bryan and conjecturing. Suddenly he perceived the deep brown orbs of Sybil fixed upon him and he rose and took a chair that was nearer to her so that he was on her left while the artist was on her right.

"You think me a barbarian," he said, "but no, I am not that. When I came into your charming home, into this cultured atmosphere, I felt that I was glad to be in England."

"Yes, but," said Sybil, "we are accused of being much too uncontinental."

"If there were more like you, how bright this London would appear!"

Sybil smiled indulgently, and as he looked at her sitting with her legs crossed, leaning back slightly in her chair, he made up his mind that she was a richly seductive type of womanhood, a very brilliant specimen.

The artist said:

"The world is becoming cosmopolitan, and yet in art there is, and always will be, nationality. We express the fatherland in every stroke we make. Turner expressed London as no foreign artist ever could have done. Foreign critics say that in the little things I draw I am distinctly insular."

"Oh, yes, you are," said Sybil. "You even stand indeed on an island by yourself!"

Bently looked at her somewhat suspiciously, as though uncertain whether the remark was made in jest or earnest.

Ames said:

"Do we not all stand on islands? the island of our personality, of our self-esteem, the island of our I's? How can any one of us completely realise the other? And it is well we cannot, for if we could there would be an end of the misunderstandings which give interest to life. I prefer to live, I think, in an imperfect rather than in a perfect world."

"I also," Sybil said. "I don't care for perfection."

"Perhaps," said Bently, "familiarity, in your case, breeds contempt."

She answered with a frown:

"You know I don't like compliments. If I were perfect I should be—as I'm not."

"If you were not as you are," said Ames, "it would be a pity."

"Now, that's the kind of compliment I like," she said, turning to the artist.

"I see," he said, with something of offended pride. "I shall remember for another time. Now, I must say good-bye."

He left, and Ames and Sybil were alone, Bryan and Maud having withdrawn to the recess at the extreme end of the room.

"I'm glad you came this afternoon," she said. "I was feeling nervish, and you've done me good. Now tell me all about yourself, your tastes, and aims."

"My tastes? I like the things you like. My aims? In process of formation."

"What an unusual man you are!"

"Have I the misfortune to displease you?"

"No."

"When first I saw you at Mrs. Beauchamp's house," Ames said, "I judged that your perceptions were of a higher order, your senses delicate, refined. And as I look at you I see that I was right. Your nerves respond to the slightest stimulus, your emotions are intense, your tastes eclectic; you belong to the aristocracy of Nature."

She answered:

"You seem to know me better than I know myself."

"Do you think we shall become friends?"

"Why not? There's only one thing about you that I don't quite like. You seem to have abandoned painting. Why?"

"Because I have grown lazy."

"And so have I. People have taken me out into the world of brilliant laziness and I have no longer the inclination to take up a brush. Some day, I tell myself, I shall return to my old loves; but that day never comes."

"It never will."

"How do you know?"

"Because you have joined those who never toil or spin and the example is contagious."

"No, they live but to enjoy. And yet they are always at the head of things."

"Yes, always."

She said:

"You will stay to dinner, won't you? My mother will be there!"

But he, not wishing to infeodate himself, declined, giving as a pretext an engagement at his club. He did not know before that she possessed a mother, and on the whole he was not quite sure that he was glad to learn the fact. Mothers were matrimonially coercive, and he did not want to be coerced. Nevertheless she was excessively attractive, and he said:

"During the season you have plenty of engagements, naturally?"

She smiled.

"Well, even the prince invites me now."

"Oh, then your prospects are extensive!"

"They would be were I other than I am."

"Being as you are, I hope that you will come to my receptions later on."

She said disappointedly:

"Well, of course, if you invite me I shall come, if I am free."

"If I knew when you were free, I should arrange my dates to coincide."

She acknowledged this with a shake of her head of dubious meaning.

"Come again when you like, I shall be glad to see you."

This was said with a little condescension, and upon this Ames took leave.

The invitations to the first dinner party at Carlton Terrace were all accepted, and when the night arrived all those who had accepted them arrived. Ames, alone, received them in his drawing-room. They were what he designated in his mind as a first provisional muster, inasmuch as they were the best he could procure from the circle of acquaintance which he had had time to form. The Pentons came in force, as well as a Member to whom they had introduced him and who was to support his candidature later on. There were some of the leading bachelors of his club, an Italian professor and his wife who were at that moment spending a month in London, and, in addition to others of minor social value, there were the Smeatons, who, in Ames' opinion, were the most important people of the evening. Mrs. Beauchamp he had omitted. She was a debtor, and for all he knew might not only be his debtor, but that of others also, and therefore, since monetary considerations were supreme, she could not be considered socially eligible.

On his right at dinner was Lady Smeaton. Mrs. Penton was on his left; Lucy being some distance down the table, next to the politician.

"And so," said Mrs. Penton, "you are going to live in this big house by yourself. I call that quite original."

"It is," said Lady Smeaton; "but Mr. Ames would be nothing if not original."

"If my home were smaller, it would be unworthy of my friends."

"A very nice way of excusing your magnificence."

"The truth is," said the Italian upon Mrs. Penton's left, "the time is approaching when, with the rise of socialism, we shall be forced to ask permission to possess. For some time I thought I was quite safe in depositing my modest savings here in England, but I now see that they will not always be safe."

Penton, who was seated not far down the table, said:

"*I'm* thinking of transferring my shekels to Constantinople. I fancy that they may be safer there than here."

"And I," said his wife, "am thinking of digging a small hole in the ground."

Ames thought: "There wouldn't be much to put in it."

He said:

"Be not afraid. As democracy obtains its ends, it is caught in the net of property. Each of those who clamour for equality of ownership will be glad to modify his views as soon as he accedes to ownership. I say modify, because of all these democratic efforts something must remain. Whether we like it or not, we shall be made to clip a portion of our wings."

"And yet," said Lady Smeaton, "those people talk of justice."

"Justice for each class," suggested Ames, "may be that which brings it the most advantages."

"Well, that is as it should be. We shall go on fighting for advantage to the end."

"Yes," said Penton, "for we must. We cannot help ourselves."

"It almost makes me wish," said Lady Smeaton, "that I had been born a hundred years ago."

"I'm sure," said Ames, "that none of us wish that."

A little later, when Ames went up to the drawing-room, he found Lucy Penton in a corner looking at a medallion portrait of a lady painted on ivory and framed in gold, which was visible through the glass door of a cabinet.

"That is your mother, is it not?" she asked, and he assented.

"What a beautiful old lady!"

His mother, although not plain, was certainly not beautiful. His own beauty he had inherited from his father.

The excessive panegyric sounded in his ears as comic.

He said: "Is not the execution exquisite? It was done by a friend of mine at Florence."

"A lady?" she inquired.

"A man—a mere artistic man!"

"I noticed from the first," she said, "it was a masterpiece."

And he concluded: "Insincerity thy name is Penton."

She said in a low tone:

"How well you spoke at dinner. You said exactly what I think."

"In that case," he replied, "my thoughts increase in value in my estimation."

She said:

"Aren't you lonely in this great big house?"

At first he was inclined to answer "No," but thinking that this would sound unnecessarily independent and aloofish and knowing that the negative would make it difficult for her to proceed with what he called *argumentum ad matrimonium*, he simply murmured: "Yes."

He knew she could not say: "Why don't you marry?" and the position was thus left enigmatic, as he wished that it should be. And for a moment, as she was silent, he contemplated her, thinking that it was a pity that a girl so handsome should be compelled to flatter, vexed with her for supposing that he could be influenced by tactics such as these. Then he left her to talk to his other guests and particularly to a pale young man, the son of a ruined earl, who was said to have the *entrée* into the houses of the greatest magnitude. His name was the Hon. Stephen Moore, and Ames, who thought much of his importance, prevented him from being bullied by a general.

Moore in gratitude presently said:

"I should really like to introduce you to a friend of mine, to Lady Ventner."

"Good!" said Ames, "that is the woman whom I particularly wish to know."

An appointment was therefore made.

When the party broke up a little later, Ames was standing in the hall, waiting to take a final leave of his guests, when Lucy Penton glided up to him.

Covering her white neck with a boa, she exclaimed:

"Mr. Ames, I wonder if you would do me a great favour. We bought a mezzotint the other day and I should so like to compare it with your own to see if it is really by Bartolozzi. Do you think I might call to-morrow afternoon, just for a minute, with mamma, and bring it?"

Ames expressed himself delighted with the proposition, suggesting they should come to tea, to which she readily agreed.

III

The next day was a rainy one. Ames stayed in all the morning dictating letters to his secretary and reading a treatise on the principles of politics by a professor, smiling at times as he realised how far aloof this academic person was from the politics of actual experience, as they were to be studied day by day, and wondering to what extent legislators were ever guided by the lofty views the book contained, certain that if he entered Parliament he would find them quite unknown.

As four o'clock approached, he could not repress a certain agitation. Lucy was seductive. He perceived in her rare beauty of proportion. She was of the richest womanhood. He knew quite well that the mezzotint was only an excuse and he felt almost flattered that she should seek a pretext for his sake. For his sake or for his fortune's sake? Ah! that was the question which he well perceived it would be difficult if not impossible to answer.

On the stroke of four, as he was sitting in the library, Giacomo came to announce Miss Lucy Penton.

"Alone?" inquired Ames.

"*Si signor. La signora è sola.*"

Somewhat surprised, Ames ascended to the drawing-room, where he found Lucy unfolding a parcel in her lap.

"Mother could not come," she said. "She wasn't very well, and so I've had to beard the lion in his den."

"For you the lion, as you are pleased to call him, shall become a lamb."

"Oh, but I prefer him to remain a lion, especially as I'm not afraid."

And she looked at him provokingly, meeting his glance for a moment and then continuing to remove the tissue paper from the mezzotint.

"There," she said, "there is the object for which I want to ask advice."

He took from her the circular picture, examined it, pronounced it spurious and offered to prove it so by comparison with a genuine Bartolozzi down below. They descended to the library where he soon convinced her of the truth of his assertion.

"It was father bought the wretched thing," she said, "not I."

He led her to a seat, rang and ordered tea.

"Do you know," he said presently, observing her as she poured the tea, "you remind me of a portrait of a lady in the gallery of Florence, which excites the admiration of all who see it."

In reality she reminded him far more of a Bavarian beauty whom he had once known in Rome, but as he thought that no one woman can ever hear another praised with equanimity he gave the compliment the Florentine complexion.

"Do you mean that really? I've often been told such things before, by people who, for what I cared, might as well not have said them. But with you it's different."

"Do you really honour me by caring a little what I think?"

"Well, of course I do. Are you not superior to most of the men I meet?"

Ames was somewhat disconcerted. This praise did not touch his vanity which he kept sternly in subjection; but it seemed to turn the tables on him and left him almost at a loss for a reply.

Perceiving this, she said:

"It's unusual, is it not, for a woman to be frank?"

"It enhances her attractiveness, I think."

"Do you know," she said, "I feel an irresistible desire to confide in you. You don't seem the kind of man that would betray a woman."

"No, certainly."

"I was sure of it; but before I begin, if you've no objection, I'll light a cigarette." She had produced a gold case from her pocket, saying:

"Please don't offer me any. I'm accustomed to my special brand. Will you not try it?"

He took a cigarette from her and he watched her as she lit the little gold-tipped cylinder.

Instinctively, he associated the smoking habit on the part of women with laxity or a decided tendency towards it. It indicated, he considered, a dislike of self-restraint, a desire to find satisfaction somehow, to counteract the stress of nervous tension, to temporarily calm the working of strong passions.

"My father is forcing me to marry an old man."

She paused to see the effect her words had made; but Ames' face betrayed no indication of his thoughts.

"Forcing?" he repeated.

"Yes, and of course you wonder why. Things with us are not as they seem, do you understand? I'm to be the saviour of the family."

"The old man being rich?"

She nodded.

Suddenly he felt conscious of emotion. That this superb creature should be sacrificed, and made to endure a marriage contradictory to nature, seemed to him, if true, a crime, and one which he would like to hinder. But how? By marrying her himself, as she had evidently come there to suggest? Was she not as rare a sample of the other sex as he would ever find? Just as suddenly as he experienced it, he quelled the feeling that was drawing him towards her. He wanted to know more.

"That would be unheard of, monstrous," he declared, taking a seat nearer to her and gazing into her face. "You are entitled to a share of the joy of life and you must not be thus sacrificed."

"You speak as though you had a choice, but I have none and the time is short. My father's creditors are pressing."

"What are his liabilities?"

"Not very much. Five or six thousand pounds."

"If he were relieved, would you still think of this marriage?"

"Yes."

He started slightly. He had expected a different answer.

"Why?"

"Because I *must* be married."

He gazed at her again. Was this a comedy she was playing to lead him on to matrimony or was there some serious cause which rendered it imperative that she should, as she said, be married?

"But why," he asked, "since you must marry, should you marry age instead of youth?"

"Because youth will not do what age will."

"And what is the compulsion?"

"Ah! now you ask me too much. For the rest, it cannot matter at all to you."

"It does, for I desire nothing more than to see you happy."

"What, I wonder, would you do to make me so?"

Why could he not say "marry you"? He often asked himself that question after she had left him. Was it that, looking into her eyes as he did then, he read, or thought he read, that she was no longer what she was credited with being? No, the ancient prejudice against the breach of maidenhood affected him but little. It was based upon a metaphysical conception of the marriage state and such conceptions were quite foreign to his mind. As long, he thought, as the remarriage of divorced women was accepted, and he saw no reason why it should not be, it was impossible to logically ban the marriage of those women who by accident or folly, from love or through deception, had lost the quality of the *jeune fille*, especially when there were no visible results. Of course it depended somewhat upon what was sought in marriage. If the principal end was offspring, then no doubt the question was a little complicated, but he had never yet been conscious of the paternal instinct and he doubted greatly whether it existed strongly in the men of the present age. And this suspicion of her, after all, was perhaps unfounded, although as he looked at her, and noticed the slight abandonment with which she leaned back in her chair, and something indefinable in the expression of her face, it seemed to him by no means without cause. Also, circumstances played an important part in the determination of what might and might not be done. Much could be excused to a woman who possessed good nature, and much especially to one of Lucy's charm.

"What would I do?" he asked. "All in my power to help you to forget your troubles—all."

She rose and threw her cigarette into the grate impatiently.

"But nothing to prevent them. Good!"

She stood before him in the full power of her beauty, and for a moment he felt an impulse to take her in his arms, agreeing to her terms. But no, he would not place that chain around his neck at the outset of his career, not knowing into what complications it might lead him, determined that his better reason should not be obscured by the sex impulsion—strong within him at that moment. Æsthetically she might be perfect, but there were other qualities and attributes he felt himself entitled to demand before he took a step which brought him and his private life under the ægis of the obsolete and ill-made laws that regulated marriage in the land. He did not want to place his peace of mind at the mercy of a woman brought up in the environment in which she had been reared.

During the silence which ensued he, too, rose, and as he did so he was in arm's length of the button which, when pressed, admitted to the Eastern room.

He believed she would have followed him down there, but no, that was not his policy, that wasn't what he wished to do. He said at length:

"But they may not be troubles after all. Perhaps the marriage which you contemplate is the wisest step that you can take, and one that will eventually lead to happiness."

Her eyes flashed, but she repressed her indignation.

"You know very well it won't."

And he felt guilty, recognising that he had been insincere.

"Shall I tell you what they'll do to me?" she asked. "They'll make me wicked. I'm not that yet, but it will come. Then I shall make others suffer—you, perhaps, some day."

"After all," she added, "you act as only a rich man can. If I were in your place no doubt I should do the same. As the Germans say, *Es lebe das Leben.*"

She said this in a tone of indifference, but it was plain to Ames that she herself was suffering. Well, he did not like to make women suffer, but there was such a thing as duty towards oneself.

There was a knock at the door and Giacomo entered, bearing a slip of paper which he gave to Ames.

On it was written the name of Mrs. Beauchamp.

"In the blue room," Ames directed, and Giacomo left.

"I wonder now what you really think of me?" she asked.

"Were I to be frank I should praise you so exceedingly that you might take it as an exaggeration if, as I expect, you are not fully conscious of your worth."

"You're cleverer with words than I."

Ames did not like sophistry, but she forced him, he considered, to resort to it as the only means of avoiding giving her offence.

She added: "You'll come to my wedding, I suppose. It will be truly a white affair. Even the bridegroom will be in the right note since his hair is as white as snow."

Ames did not like to hear her talk like this, and it scarcely seemed to him good taste. He was annoyed with her for spoiling with her speech the prestige of her beauty.

"Had you not said," he exclaimed, somewhat bluntly, "that it was urgent you should marry this old man, I should have asked you to let me be your banker, so that you might gain time."

"It's kind of you, but it's urgent and it must be done."

"In that case there's no more to be said about it."

"No. Good-bye."

She put on her cloak hastily, and refusing a cab went out into the rain.

When the door had closed he returned to the library, where he remained for some time, thinking of her with feelings of regret for something valuable lost and at the same time anger for her action in coming to him there, because he realised that this, together with the mysterious "must," had turned him away from her, had caused the inhibition which he had experienced.

Had it then come to this? Was the desire for wealth so overpowering that none of the old scruples stood before it? Ah, this was decadence indeed!

He mused morosely for some time until he was roused by Giacomo.

" Does the signor not wish to see the lady in the blue room? "

A smile stole over Ames' face. Of course he did. There was no better antidote to regret for one woman than the society of another. He jumped to his feet at once.

" I'll go. And look here, Giacomo, if any more ladies come to-day, I'm out."

He ascended the stairs with some alacrity.

Edith Beauchamp was walking up and down the room in evident impatience.

" At last you've come," she said. " I was beginning to think you had forgotten me."

" Could I be guilty of so great a crime? "

" I came," she continued, " because I couldn't delay thanking you for what you did for me. Oh, you dear, rich man! "

She took his hand and pressed it and he led her to the sofa-chair.

" How delightful of you to visit me," he said, taking a seat beside her and admiring her form.

" It's a dreadful thing for me to do, I know, or rather it was until quite lately, when women can do anything they please. At any rate, I felt that I might not have an opportunity of seeing you for months if I waited till you called. For you must by this time be beseiged with invitations. What a beautiful house you have! And you live here all alone? "

" Yes, all alone."

"How the women must be courting you, and one especially."

"Which one?"

"Lucy Penton—naturally."

"Why naturally?"

"Oh, because she's desperate."

"Why desperate?"

"Surely you've heard of her affair with Baron Engelstein. No? Oh, well, you'll hear it at your club."

"Please tell me," Ames inquired, "is virtue quite extinct?"

"No, when there's money to support it."

"It rests then on a financial basis?"

"Don't you think it always has?"

Ames laughed.

"Your philosophy, dear Mrs. Beauchamp, is deeper far than mine."

"You needn't call me Mrs. Beauchamp, need you? It sounds so formal."

"Do you like dispensing with formalities?"

"Oh, yes."

He placed his arm around her waist and she burst out laughing.

"Really you take one at one's word."

"But it was irresistible. Are you not superior to all the women that one meets?"

Lucy's phrase, altered to suit the circumstance, appeared to him a useful one, and he was amused to find that she was disposed to take it seriously. Nevertheless she said:

"Do you really think that? I wonder if you are in earnest. It's always so difficult to know."

"Can one help being earnest in saying such things to you?"

"When you dined with me the other day, I did not think that you would ever say them."

"Did I seem cold? Ah! well, it was the weather or the effect of politics."

She rested her head upon his shoulder.

"I don't know how you manage it, but with you I am at once unarmed."

Then he felt the intoxication creeping over him of which he had so much disgust. An entanglement with this widow? Whither would it lead him? Not probably into any inextricable situation. She had no tie, nor he. Yes, but there was the contingency of progeny, that which in plays and novels was constantly ignored. Peuh! it was slight in the present case, no doubt.

She perceived his hesitation, and, as though afraid that she had lost an advantage gained, she said:

"You are very thoughtful. Why?"

"I was thinking," he said slowly, "that you are the most seductive example of your sex that I have seen for a long time. You represent that union of beauty, amenity, and charm which is all too rare to-day."

"Now, do you mean that truly and are you really glad to have me here?"

"Can you for a moment doubt it?"

"Oh!" she said, abandoning herself, "I liked you from the first."

Then in tender tones they exchanged confidences, said the little things that real lovers say, experienced the joy of saying them.

Several times he had seen her glance at the half-open door of the inner room, and just as he was asking himself what he should do he heard a knock at the outer door. His first impulse was to take no heed of it. A second thought prevailed.

" One moment," he said, leaving her and going to the door.

It was Giacomo with a telegram.

Ames tore open the red envelope. The message was from his agent, announcing the discovery of yet another auriferous deposit. He felt his power suddenly increase and just as suddenly his old disinclination to be tied.

He hesitated. Then he said: " Excuse me for a minute," and he went out on the landing, closing the door behind him.

He stood there a few seconds. Then he called:

" Giacomo, a warm bath." He followed the valet to the bathroom, and when all was ready directed him to ask Sims to come up. Then, undressing rapidly, he slipped into the long, deep bath and immersed himself up to his mouth in the warm water.

And as soon as the sedative effect had been produced he laughed complacently.

It was not difficult. The amorous delirium might be quelled by means which were purely physical. By the action of hot water, the fire could be thus extinguished and the mind regain its calm. It was wonderful how Nature could be coerced! And poets thought they understood it! Ah!

Then, presently, when Sims appeared, he made him produce his notebook, saying he desired to dictate his electoral address.

"Of all the ills from which we suffer, there is none that is more severely felt than the inequality which too palpably exists in the distribution of advantages. And by advantage I mean not only actual metallic wealth, but all those sweet amenities of life, such as light and space, and air and recreation, which have hitherto been the privilege of small minorities. Well, it is this ill which, in the measure of my power, I am determined to combat. I do not care under what *régime* it may be, I do not pause to think. I only know that side by side are plethora and death, and my object is to destroy the one in favour of the other. Property——"

He paused a moment at the word, because he realised that he was treating of a mighty god. "Property must in the future be held on other terms than those which have hitherto prevailed. I regard property as that benefit which is entrusted to us by Nature for the comfort and the progress of society. There are few so poor that they do not possess some property, but what is essential is that all should possess property in real accordance with their reasonable needs."

Sims, as he wrote this, looked up with an expression of surprise.

"You think that socialism, Sims?"

"Well, it's very much like it. What else could it be?"

"A lot of things, according as it is interpreted. You know in Shadley, the operatives, who constitute the population, have been reading socialism lately. I must, therefore, take this into account. When once I am elected, it will be time enough to speak more clearly and to interpret my present words in a convenient sense."

"Convenient to whom?" the scribe inquired.

"Convenient to myself."

Sims grimly smiled and the dictation was continued until Ames declared his soaking was completed and he wanted to get out.

"Now, Sims, as soon as I've dressed and left, I've a mission which I'd like you to perform. I want you to go up to the blue room and inform the lady who is fretting there that business of capital importance has called me hence. Say I regret, of course, and do the thing in form."

He added, as Sims was leaving:

"And look here, don't go and fall in love with her, or she'll surely ruin you."

Sims said: "Ruin me? That would indeed be difficult."

"Why? You are my secretary. You are not without prospects. Only try to be more cheerful, Sims, for you depress me sometimes, and that I do not like."

A gleam of hope passed over the secretary's face as he closed the door.

With the aid of Giacomo, Ames was not long dressing, and when he was dressed he went out into the street. The rain had ceased and the sky was clearing. It was nearly six o'clock.

Ames passed up Regent Street enjoying the evening breeze and smoking a cigarette.

He was perfectly calm and rational, that he admitted to himself, but he also recognised that he was somewhat dull, oppressed by a sense of loss of opportunity. He had conquered the desire, but he could not overcome the feeling of regret which had survived.

Such a handsome woman and of such easy morals! That was not to be met with every day, perhaps, and he had placed too much restraint upon himself, it might be, in the pursuance of his aims.

As he was thinking thus, he perceived in front of him a fair-haired girl in a blue serge dress. In an instant her figure satisfied his sense of symmetry. The back was straight, the waist in strict proportion, the hips as ample as Nature, in her generic aims, intended they should be. She was walking briskly and the heels of her boots clattered gaily on the pavement. Impelled by curiosity, Ames quickened his pace and overtook her. Her face did not belie her figure. Fresh and firm and classical, it seemed to Ames seductive. He noticed that she was carrying a small brown paper parcel, somewhat as though she were a milliner's assistant which, in spite of her well-bred air, he fancied that she was.

As he passed her, she did not look at him, and he slackened his pace so that she might overtake him, wishing to see her a second time. She slackened hers, so that it was not until he stopped a moment before a shop window that she overtook him. He followed her half-way up the Quadrant, until at length he saw her disappear in a shop which, as far as he could understand, sold only corsets.

Now this, Ames deemed, was awkward. If she had entered one of the large drapers' shops where the public circulated freely he would certainly have followed her. But how should he enter this veritable gynæceum, on what pretext, or in what guise? Silly that he was! Could he not say that he was an emissary? Were there not ladies in the country who asked men to shop for them at times? Of course, it must be so, and whether it was or not he meant to assume it was.

He waited a few minutes to concoct his story and to allow time, as he calculated, to the girl to divest herself of her street apparel should she be a seller. Then he pushed the swing door and went in. He found himself in a large shop with counters on either side, behind which stood girl assistants, and a staircase opposite the door leading to the floor above. About the place were corsets, apparently of fine quality. Upon a table stood the model of a female bust in stays. As he entered, a richly dressed lady with grey hair advanced with dignity.

"I have come," Ames said, "to inquire about measurements for a lady in the country who would wish to have a corset made by you."

"Certainly," the stately lady said, calling up the stairs:

"Miss Claire, will you please come down?"

Almost immediately, the assistant named appeared, and at once Ames recognised the girl whom he had just seen in the street.

"This gentleman would like our instructions for self-measurement."

Another customer came in and she left Ames with Miss Claire, who opened a drawer and produced from it a booklet entitled: "Instruction for Self-Measuring. Blythe & Geraldine."

"The lady must be particular," she said, after explaining the system, "to take the side measurements in three places."

She spoke with a slightly foreign accent, keeping her eyes fixed upon the diagram she was explaining and thus afforded Ames an opportunity of studying her beauty. In this moment of enthusiasm, he thought that no artist in the world had ever had a finer model.

"Your system," he said, "appears to exhibit symmetry of form to excellent advantage, but now supposing that the lady's figure were not symmetrical, would it not accentuate the blemish?"

She smiled.

"In that case, sir, we put in pads."

Ames laughed.

"Good. I shall say that, if required, you'll mould the lady to the shape she likes."

Miss Claire appeared uncertain whether she should take this as facetiousness or sarcasm.

"I assure you, sir," she said, "we will give her satisfaction."

This was proffered with commercial caution, Ames considered, and it amused him somewhat.

"If I may say," he pursued, "that the young lady who explained the system to me is herself an exponent of it, and if I describe her, I am quite sure that my friend will have no further hesitation."

The colour of Miss Claire's face heightened as soon as she perceived his meaning.

"Of course," she said, after some hesitation, "we all wear—what is here."

Suddenly Ames asked:

"You are French, I think?"

"Well, Anglo-French. My father was French, my mother partly English."

He spoke to her in French, and she replied in a perfect idiom.

"I shall call in a day or two to let you know," he said, after a pause. "And when I come, I shall ask for you, and if you are not in I shall call again."

As he said this he looked at her admiringly, and she smiled half-timidly.

When he found himself in the street again he marvelled at himself. He had deserted one woman because he desired to keep free from love intrigues, and half-an-hour afterwards he was embarked upon an amorous adventure! It was true then that this sex impulsion could not be subdued. Kill it, and it arose from its own ashes.

He walked down Regent Street again and home.

As he reached his door, Sims was leaving for the day.

"How did she take it?" Ames inquired.

"Well enough at first, but when she heard that you made no appointment, and that you hadn't promised to write, she seemed inclined to cry."

Ames shrugged his shoulders. He was not disposed to commiserate with this consolable. Besides, she was his debtor, a debtor that could never pay, and, according to the world's view, she had lost a great deal of her rights to be respected. Did he adopt the world's views then? Apparently, when it suited his convenience. He did not esteem himself the more for that, and wondered if he would grow as mean as the majority of those he met.

IV

THE next day towards four o'clock Moore arrived.

"So you are going," said Ames, "to conduct me to the shrine at which I'm told there are many worshippers."

"Yes, for the lady is attractive, clever, and in a privileged position."

"What of her husband?"

"Mad."

"Really?"

"Well, practically. He sits up in his castle all day long blowing soap bubbles with his keeper when he isn't catching flies."

"How long has he been like that?"

"Five years."

"And how does the lady take it?"

"With philosophy."

As they sped along in the electric brougham, Moore told Ames more stories of his friends in the higher sets, and it was singular that all of whom he spoke appeared to have some disability or care, or to be in danger from some cause or another, and above all to be in a large degree the authors of their own misfortune. And he asked himself why, endowed as they were with advantages over the common lot, they could not lead more reasonable lives.

As they were approaching Loundes Square, Ames inquired:

"And are the Ventners rich?"

"Well, to me they seem rich enough, but I could quite conceive that to you they might seem poor."

"How much?"

"About four thousand, I have heard."

"What an injustice!"

"How?"

"To those who have only forty."

"Then do you consider yourself unjust?"

"Exceedingly."

Moore laughed with incredulity and the brougham stopped before the house in Portman Square.

"She expects us," Moore whispered as they went up the stairs; "and is, I think, quite curious to see you."

In a large drawing-room, almost buried in a high-walled sofa, they found a woman whom Ames judged to be thirty. Light hair, slightly golden, a skin of fine texture and of extreme whiteness, a face that was more elegant than beautiful, a slight figure, fairly well proportioned; these were the characteristics which Ames rapidly observed as he was introduced.

"I have heard of you, Mr. Ames," she said, "as having lived in Italy."

The last words were said with a certain air of languor, as though she were already somewhat tired by the stress of life.

"Yes, I lived there many years—yes, many happy years."

He said this with studied earnestness, because he had observed that women took an interest in earnest men. Then they spoke of Italy, which Lady Ventner knew from north to south, and which Moore also knew.

"And now tell me, Mr. Ames, what has made you leave that lovely land for England?"

"From a climatic point of view, I admit that it seems folly, but in England there are compensations such as one might seek in vain in Italy."

Lady Ventner smiled. She asked:

"Do you practise much locomotion?"

As Ames looked somewhat perplexed, she explained her meaning:

"By locomotion of course I mean motoring, yachting, travelling, tobogganing, punting."

"Yes, I'm beginning to do some of these things. I wonder why?"

"Because everybody does them. You would be a brave man indeed if you dared abstain."

"What would you think of such a man?"

"I should admire his courage and deplore his fate."

"I suppose it would be terrible indeed?"

"Appalling."

"Mr. Ames," Moore said, "is about to become a politician. He is going to contest Shadley at the bye election."

Lady Ventner moved somewhat in her chair and appeared to regard Ames with fresh interest.

"On which side?" she inquired quickly.

"Oh! can you ask that question? On the ancient side, which must always be victorious in the end."

"Of course it must, and not all the 'isms' in the world can alter that. It is arranged by Nature that there shall always be one section of society endowed with the privileges that life can give, a section that increases the value of existence and offers a model for imitation. It is a party with a settled policy. It has the prestige of tradition. It is consistent with itself, faithful to its ideals. Its aims are dignified and high. In England it is the only one that is truly national."

Ames perceived at once that he was in the presence of a woman for whom the politics of her own class were a settled creed and whose anger would be soon excited by any expression of divergence from them. He classed these people as fanatics, but they were in possession of much power and refinement. They must be humoured and encouraged to develop their conceptions and their misconceptions. Only in this way was it possible to deal with them successfully.

He said:

"Yes, you are right; it is consistent."

"I'm glad you think so, and I shall be pleased to introduce you to the leaders, most of whom are friends of mine."

This was precisely what Ames did not desire. He did not want to be infeodated at the start. He was anxious to preserve his independence. Besides, he was not really on her side, which, historically, might not be the most ancient. However, he thanked her for her offer, knowing the wide range of excuses at his disposal when the time arrived. To his satisfaction, the conversation changed, and he observed that, if she were bigoted in politics, she was singularly free from prejudice in other things. Her sense perceptions were extremely fine. In herself she was an object of *virtù.* She belonged to a higher type.

Was she indulgent or severe in regard to laxity? The question was important, because the answer to it must reveal, he thought, the fundamental nature of the woman. Wishing to test her, he brought the conversation round to some of the delinquencies of modern life, and observed that she refrained from magnifying them, from condemning or excusing, and when individuals were concerned she evinced no haste to blame, no evident delight to censure such as he had frequently detected in inferiorities. Her attitude was decidedly patrician, and he was glad that he had come that afternoon. Other visitors arrived, and presently Ames and Moore withdrew. When they were in the brougham again Moore inquired what Ames thought of the lady whom they had just visited, and the reply was:

"Charming. I am much indebted to you, Moore, for introducing me."

"Oh! she's only one. I hope to take you to some more big houses."

Ames knew the value of these introductions into the influential world, and he was not slow to express his thanks. Moore, however, coughed a little, and after a preamble as to the extreme expensiveness of modern life he said, with evident embarrassment:

"In order to keep pace, and in spite of my small income, I bought a little car about six months ago, and the wretched manufacturers are actually pressing me for the payment of the balance. I wondered whether—I did not know if——"

Ames interrupted him. Taking his arm affectionately, he said:

"My dear fellow, you have only to name the sum."

"Two hundred and fifty," murmured Moore.

"The postman shall bring them to you to-morrow morning."

"Oh! it is really too good of you to offer this; but of course I could only accept it as a loan."

"Repayable at whatever date you please."

"Thanks very much. You relieve me from a very great strain indeed."

Inwardly Ames smiled. Even Moore! he thought. What a pity! For the poor man would never again be happy in his company, and he felt that he himself, however much he might not wish to do so, would look upon him with a certain lack of interest, with embarrassment, with disapproval. Why *must* men do these things? For his part, in the most straitened period of his youth, he had never borrowed. But this was, of course, no loan. It was in reality a deal. The money was paid for the introduction, since it was almost sure that it would never be repaid. And why must Moore have a motor when he had only a pittance on which to live? No doubt it was to enable him to pass for richer than he was and thus to advance his prospects. So that all was barter, and society appeared to be one huge exchange? Well, at the base of all the motives was that of sustenance, and those who could not pursue it in the way that was considered right must either do so by methods that were called wrong or perish. Cruel alternative of a defective social state!

Moore said presently:

"In you, I know, I can have explicit confidence. You will divulge to no one the fact of this advance."

Ames said:

"To no one," thinking: "The poor fellow is trying to minimise the loss of his prestige."

They chatted of other things, and when they reached the house Ames, without inviting his friend to enter, said good-bye to him in the street, as Moore refused to be driven back to his own rooms.

A letter sent by messenger was awaiting Ames from Edith:

"After the happy time we passed together yesterday, I expected to see you again ere this. I waited for you until late last night and again this morning, but you have not come and I am left to wonder what has happened. Your secretary told me that you had been called away, but he did not say for what. Do let me have a line to tell me you are coming! Why not dine with me to-night? Your place will be laid for you, and I do trust you will not leave it empty. I am feeling very lonely and depressed. It would be a charity if you would come and cheer me.

"EDITH."

The letter was in a plaintive note and it almost touched him. It was true, no doubt, that she was fretting—a little from love, perhaps, but more from disappointment. In any case, the letter disturbed his equanimity for a few moments. The idea of an evening passed with this attractive woman was seductive and it seemed a waste of opportunity to stay away. Yes; but it was just this kind of woman that became a chain not easy to shake off, and he was well determined that he would retain his liberty.

Therefore, after a short struggle with himself, he tore the letter into pieces. He would not reply. It was a brutal course, perhaps, to take; but brutality was sometimes unavoidable in life, and it often proved to be better in the long run for its object than amenity. The merit of silence, in this case, was to check her enterprise more surely than it could be checked by any other means. The compunction that he felt in acting thus must be suppressed, and the suppression of it exercised and proved his power of self-discipline.

And then, when he came to confess to himself, as he was fond of doing, he recognised that the memory of Claire had much to do with his determination. For in respect to Claire, the danger was, or seemed to him, less great. She was not in society and consequently did not possess the powers it bestowed. To pursue her was perhaps what the French called *s'encanailler*, although when he thought of her grace and distinction he found it difficult to use the term.

What somewhat held him back was the energy required to conduct the enterprise in the way he wished, for he felt already that wealth had made him lazy.

Nevertheless, in the morning, after breakfast, he left his house and walked to Jermyn Street, to execute a project he had formed in the waking hours of the night. When he reached the discreet and narrow thoroughfare which had been his home on his arrival he looked around for a few moments, then entered a house above the door of which was written "Apartments." He was shown a bedroom and a sitting-room, both well furnished.

"I take them for three months," said Ames, producing a banknote, "and pay for them at once. Please write out a receipt for the three months' rent to Mr. Ames."

This was done and Ames returned to Carlton Terrace. He had acquired another home of many capabilities, a place where he could model when the fancy took him, where he could write and mature plans.

For the next few days Ames was busily engaged preparing for the first meeting of his electors and had little time for love affairs.

Invitations also were beginning to reach him in increasing numbers. Even the Norton-Youngs, who were generally somewhat indifferent, asked him rather pressingly to come to a reception they were holding soon.

There was an invitation to the wedding of Lucy Penton to a German count, whose age, Ames had been told, was sixty-five. Cynical, Ames reflected, as he placed the card upon the mantel. Life must be lived, had she not said, and its chances must be taken? Yes, but life should never be betrayed!

There was one invitation which he accepted readily—that which came from Lady Ventner, because he thought that she, at least, could have no interested motive to pursue, and also because he liked her for her charm.

But he was beginning to find that the state of being rich had certain disadvantages which he would never have suspected. At his club he found that he was obliged to choose his friends in two classes, the rich, or the parasital poor; because the independent and high-souled poor avoided him, not wishing, as he thought, to be confounded with the parasital class, knowing also that they could not keep his pace. And yet they were the men for whom alone he had some admiration. As for the rich, they seemed to him for the most part arrogant and largely engaged in ruining their health by their excesses. When he was poor, many of them had seemed fools to him, and now that he was rich they seemed fools still. They irritated him by always presupposing that he did as they, that he invariably followed the prescribed course.

There was only one member of the club, however, that could not well be classed in any of the categories. His name was Craig, and no one knew his income. He was the author of some philosophic works that no one in the club had ever read, but which were held in some esteem, it was understood, by the learned world. On account of his logic and his powers of analysis he was listened to, although by not a few he was disliked and feared.

The day before the meeting Ames had been speaking to a rich newspaper proprietor named Richards, who had been explaining to him the scope of his rotary machines and causing to germ in his mind the idea of a journal of his own. Stout and alcoholic, this man was nevertheless a clever mystifier of the public that had made him rich. One of his many papers professed to take the part of the humble and the poor, and most of the economic news that it discussed was carefully arranged in such a way that the readers should be kept alive to the injustice of the employer and the simple honesty of the employed, although his own men bitterly complained of the way in which he treated them. The initiated knew that his true aim was to lead the people back into the hands of capital as soon as he had gained their confidence, and the reason why he was a member of the Berkshire Club was that this establishment had no very settled politics, having become confused in its political allegiance some time before on the Irish issue.

As Ames was listening to this magnate, amused at his self-sufficiency, Craig joined them.

"I was telling Mr. Ames," said Richards, "that when he gets into Parliament we shall expect much of him."

"In Parliament," Craig said, "as far as my observation goes, an individual can achieve little. He is powerless if he stands alone, and as a partisan he is not free."

Then adjusting his glasses and scrutinising Ames, he asked after a momentary pause:

"May I inquire why you seek to enter Parliament?"

Ames saw the trap and he replied:

"Chiefly because it is considered distinction to be there."

"And do you consider it as such?"

"My own opinion is of no importance in the matter."

"That of the majority, you think, suffices."

"For my purpose, yes, it does."

"So far as it goes," said Craig, "that is satisfactory. If you are elected, there will at least be one member who will not ask us to believe that he is there for his country's good."

"You appear to have no faith in the system. Could you tell us how it is to be reformed?"

"Not with human nature as it is."

"Then should we not accept what we cannot mend?"

"I do not think so."

"What then can we do?"

"Endeavour to devise another that will afford no opportunity to 'human nature' to confuse and spoil it—a system that would attract the men that the present one repels."

"Which men," said Richards, "are of course philosophers."

"I am surprised," said Craig, "to hear you use a word so obsolete."

With this he moved away, and Richards said:

"Unpractical, high-stilted person!"

"Quite out of place, I should imagine," Ames remarked, with a quiet smile, "in the Berkshire Club."

As he walked home Ames thought of this conversation. This man perceived the weakness of the political machine. Many, no doubt, perceived it also, but he differed from them by the impulse which compelled him to proclaim a truth which others veiled. This man must lead a life saddened by his perceptions and, what was more, he must incur the odium or the enmity of those who took things as they were and derived profit from them. Well, there had always been, and probably would always be, men who had the instinct of perfectibility, who never were, and never could be, satisfied with the inferiority which passed current as superiority. And he himself, was he of these? He did not know. The future would decide.

Although busy with these reflections, he was conscious that an impulse which he could not resist had directed his steps to Regent Street. In a few moments he found himself before the shop of Blythe & Geraldine, and as he stood hesitating as to whether he should enter, the door opened, and Claire came out.

She recognised him instantly.

"You were coming in?" she asked.

"Yes, about that order. It's to you alone I prefer to explain the thing. If you are leaving, I must come again."

"I will return," she said, with a pleasant smile, and they pushed the swing doors simultaneously. In an instant she had divested herself of her hat and stood behind the counter facing him.

"Well," said Ames, "I have heard from my relative who's coming to town for a flying visit, and thinks it better that you should measure her. Can you come to 9 Jermyn Street on Friday next at six o'clock?"

"Oh, certainly. What name?"

"Ames."

The young girl wrote the appointment in a book, and Ames, preserving a serious demeanour to avoid suspicion, withdrew after a remark about the fineness of the day.

Why was it that when he found himself in the street again he was discontented with himself? Accustomed to self-analysis, he recognised that under the influence of sex impulsion he had had recourse to subterfuge, and he was conscious of a feeling that in his privileged position he ought to have been able to dispense with that. Oh! but he would be frank with her as soon as he had an opportunity, and all love enterprises required certain preparations which could not always be sincere.

Thinking thus, he walked to his rooms in Jermyn Street, where, although it was late, he ordered tea and questioned the proprietor as to the possibility of having meals should he require them.

That evening he spent with Jones, his agent, listening to his report of the tendencies and occupations of the inhabitants of his constituency, and reading parliamentary debates.

"What chance have I?" he inquired of the middle-aged, round-headed Welshman who was in charge of his political affairs.

"Every chance," was the reply. "They must have a man who will contribute largely to their charities and institutions, for they are well-nigh bankrupt now."

"Then you think they will elect me for my purse?"

"Well, of course they might have other reasons, but that will be a weighty factor in the case."

"Quite so; it has become the only one in life."

Jones said:

"If it were not for that, the socialist might have a chance. A good many of the electors have socialistic tendencies."

"I hope," said Ames, "I shall know how to conciliate these worthy people."

"From what I have seen, Mr. Ames, I should think you would. You have the power of appearing to be upon all sides at once."

"Sides? Now, Jones, confess that sides are only make-believe! You yourself care no more for one side than another."

"Oh, really, Mr. Ames!"

"You know you don't. Admit it honestly."

Jones laughed.

"Well, you see I'm like an organ that was made to play one tune. If I were put in the other camp to-morrow I should be quite lost."

"But suppose my competitor offered you a thousand pounds to go to him, do you think you'd hesitate?"

"Oh, what a supposition!"

"Say plainly, No."

"Of course when a man has a wife and family——"

"Yes, Jones, I have observed that the possession of a wife and family is held to condone much."

"You will learn what it means some day, Mr. Ames."

"Perhaps, Jones; although I think it doubtful."

V

On the evening of the meeting, Ames drove down to the hall in Shadley. He had embarked upon this business without knowing whether he was fitted for it or being sure that he could speak. He told himself, however, that if he was unable to creditably address an audience of such limited intelligence as that which he knew would gather there to-night he must be very dull indeed, and that he was by no means ready to admit.

Entering the ante-room, he conversed with the chairman, a local magnate and M. P., as well as with a few supporters whom the former had procured, and presently they all ascended the platform.

The room was already almost full, and Ames, who was greeted with applause, saw before him an audience which, as far as he could judge, belonged, for the most part, to the skilled artisan and the trading classes, with a row or two of the aristocracy in front.

As he was surveying these foremost rows, he perceived a lady whom he thought he knew. Surely beneath that veil was the face of Edith! Extraordinary boldness on her part to be there! Almost at the same instant he became aware that speaking to her was Sybil Norton-Young. Both were dressed in black and both seemed to avoid looking in his direction. Ah! well, if they liked to lose an evening thus he had no objection. But how strange of Edith not to take offence! Did she mean to "fasten on" to him, he wondered. That, of all things, was what he would not brook.

The chairman introduced the candidate in a short address, in which he dwelt upon the needs of the constituency, the wish and ability of Ames to meet them. He had had an opportunity of ascertaining the political ideals which Mr. Ames had set before him, and he could assure the audience that they were of the soundest character.

When Ames rose he was greeted with loud applause, which, however, having been arranged beforehand by the agent, was far from general. He told the gathering that he met them as a friend who, in return for the honour they had done him in coming there that night, would endeavour to explain to them frankly, and without reticence, his views of the situation and his projects for reform. Then, in an oration which lasted for well-nigh half an hour, he unfolded before them in a tone of conversation the policy which he had constructed in his mind since he first resolved to enter politics. Ostensibly a Radical, because he had observed that in England the Radical stood conveniently between Liberalism and Socialism, and was the most able to move as the balance of power swayed; he did not dwell upon party principles, but applied himself to the task of proving his ability to deal with economic ills, the only ones which, as he well knew, the electors of his times held serious, and his speech was so carefully devised to meet the needs of the classes without striking at the vital interest of any of them, that it was often quoted afterwards as a model of non-commitment. And although he himself thought it a piece of sophistry, of which he might have been ashamed if he had not held all politics to be little more than sophistry, it was a remarkable success, and won him, before he resumed his seat, the favour of an audience whom his wealth had already well disposed.

This caused him satisfaction, because it proved that he had the faculty of speech, and therefore the power to persuade and to direct. Speech was the avenue to influence, and influence was needful to the attainment of that gratified self-love which appeared to be the chiefest end of action in the world.

When the meeting was over, he descended to the hall to speak with some of the important tradesmen of the district, who gathered round him in a ring. As he was listening to their views, propounded in a naïve dogmatic manner that amused him, he could see the two ladies whom he knew standing near the door, as if uncertain whether to go or stay, and apparently engaged in arguing the point. Once or twice during the address he had caught the gaze of Sybil fixed upon him with an earnestness that seemed sincere. He felt a certain inclination to speak to her, but none at all to speak with Edith, who had assumed an air half sly, half sullen, whenever he had glanced in her direction.

At length he saw them leave, and he concluded that they had felt ashamed to stay.

He was forced to talk to his supporters for ten minutes more, and when at length he reached the vestibule he found the two ladies standing at the door, looking at the rain, which was falling in torrents, and waiting for a cab.

Going up to them he said:

"As you have done me the honour to come here, will you not allow me to drive you home? There are no cabs on a night like this."

Sybil answered promptly:

"Thank you; we were beginning to despair."

Edith remained silent, although endeavouring to smile.

The brougham was in waiting, and they entered it at once. Ames, whose presence of mind was rarely at fault, realised at once that if he deposited Sybil first he would be left alone with Edith, and as this perspective did not please him he told the footman to drive first to Edith's, and then to the Norton-Youngs'. But Edith had partly overheard.

"Where did you tell him to go first?" she asked.

"To your house," he answered, in his softest tone.

"But it's ever so much further from here than Sybil's," she protested.

"Is it really?" he asked, as though he were learning a new fact. "But my chauffeur's knowledge of short cuts is wonderful, and he will have already remedied my error in his mind. What a wretched evening!"

Edith said no more, but as the street lights fell upon her features he could see that they were contracted, and when they reached her house, she alighted with a mere "good-night."

Sybil said, as soon as they were alone: "Your speech was really excellent!" And he told her how pleased he had been to perceive her there that night and how much he hoped that, in the future, they would often meet.

"You pleased us from the first," she said, "because you were not like the other Crœsuses one comes across. Call whenever you are able. Both my sister and myself are of bachelor proclivities, if that's of any interest to you."

He seized this opportunity to say:

"I love your frankness, and I understand that you, with your artistic nature and your freedom from conventionality, should have no inclination for what is really an irksome state. I share that sentiment myself."

"But," he murmured after a pause, "if we are celibates from choice, that is no reason why we should not be friends in the fullest, most sympathetic, and, if I may say so, the most affectionate of ways."

He looked into her face again to judge the impression he had made. And then continued:

"What is there in this life worth hoping for if not for friendship of this kind? We cannot live without the solace of such ties."

"Indeed we cannot," she exclaimed, carried away by his persuasiveness.

Then he told her that as soon as he could spare time from politics he would call often if she would allow him, and that would afford an opportunity of pursuing the ideal friendship which they had begun that night. But at this she seemed a little disappointed, as though she thought the time he spoke of somewhat too remote, and he, perceiving this, continued:

"In the meantime, I hope to come and spend at least one happy evening shortly at your house."

"Yes, come," she said, "and soon."

They had reached the Norton-Youngs', and she alighted. Ames desired nothing more than to spend the remainder of the evening with her. He felt certain that she would have allowed him to do so if he had given the slightest indication of his wish; but the voice of what he called his *Daimon*, or familiar spirit, sounded in his ears, and he refrained.

"Good-night," he said, pressing her hand affectionately.

"Good-night," she answered, giving him a last look as she unlatched the door.

The evening, he reflected as he drove home, had been successful. The meeting had been very satisfactory and his encounter with the two women had been just as he could have wished that it should be.

He wondered whether he should permit himself to think that Sybil was more earnest than the rest. Perhaps, since she did not seek marriage. There was here a mystery, however, which he must solve when he had time.

The next morning, as he was reading the report of his meeting in the morning papers, Giacomo entered, bearing a card which he handed to his master.

Ames read, "Mr. Francis Elford," and said to Giacomo:

"Show him in."

Ames gave a nod of recognition to the dark-complexioned man of middle age who stepped into the room.

"You remember me at Rome?" the latter said.

Again Ames moved his head.

"Ah! those were the good times when we used to live in that large house near the Corso. But that was seven years ago, and since that I have met with nothing but misfortune. My mining ventures all proved bad and my wife went off with an Italian officer. I am in the sorest straits, and I thought, for the sake of the old times when we were together at the school of art, that you would help me. I'm trying to start an agency for clerks, but it requires a little outlay, and I am without funds."

Ames said:

"I remember you, my friend, when you were rich. The last time I saw you in the street you invited me to dinner, saying that you would write and name the day. That day you never named and never meant to name. But such treatment you considered good enough for me. And now you come and ask me to assist you!"

Elford began a protest, but Ames stopped him:

"Not another word. I know your type. Through the ages it has never changed. Here is a five-pound note. Take it or leave it, as you please."

Elford had grown crimson. Evidently a struggle was taking place in him between his remaining pride and his desire to obtain the money. Finally he took the note and withdrew with a muttered "Thanks."

When he was gone, Ames called Giacomo.

"Never again admit that man."

When the Friday came, Ames passed the afternoon at his rooms in Jermyn Street, reading a French play which had been sent to him by its author, and arranging the modelling stand which he had procured. When six o'clock approached, after instructing the valet to admit a lady asking for the name of Ames, he waited, not without some flutter of excitement, for the arrival of the *corsetière*. It seemed to him almost wonderful that he should have laid this plot—the first of the kind that he had ever laid—and he reasoned that he must be more than ordinarily beneath the influence of the sex impulsion which had made him scheme like this. He would not admit that he had any settled end in view. He had asked her to come there because he felt that he would like to be with her alone, to talk to her, to study her, and, no doubt, make love to her. But there was to be no trap. She would be free to go.

At length he heard a ring, and presently Claire entered, bearing a small parcel.

She started slightly when she saw there was no one in the room but Ames.

"I regret to say," said Ames, "that the lady has not yet arrived. I should have let you know before. It is inexcusable of me to have given you the trouble of coming here in vain."

She answered:

"Oh! it is no trouble. Perhaps you will let us know when the lady is in town."

With this she was withdrawing, when Ames stopped her.

"Do not go so soon. Give me your parcel and let me beg of you to take a seat. I saw from the first that you were a lady."

He waited to see what effect the latter part of this little speech had had, well knowing the psychology of class.

She said, abandoning the packet with some hesitation and taking the proffered chair:

"My father was a French master and a *Bachelier-es-Lettres.* My mother was an artist's daughter."

"I knew," exclaimed Ames, with increased conviction, "that I was not wrong."

"But," she continued, "my father died while I was still at school, and I lost my mother, with whom I lived, three years ago. Then I went into business. That is my history."

"I, too," said Ames, "have lost both parents, and I, too, would no doubt have been in business had I not been left some little means."

Then they chatted for a while, he telling her of his love for art, of his travels, and she listening to him with apparent interest, until at length, looking at the clock, she suddenly exclaimed:

"It's getting late; I must be going, or they'll wonder what I have been doing since the lady was not there."

Ames said:

"We'll soon get over that. Let me ask you to take your own measurements and order a corset upon it. I'm certain it will fit."

"Oh! I'm afraid you don't quite realise how figures differ. With our system, one-sixteenth of an inch would spoil it all. We really must wait till the lady comes."

As she was moving towards the door, Ames said:

"I will be frank with you. There is no lady. I have no relative in the wide world. I invented this little fiction simply because, ever since the day I saw you first, I have been longing to know you, and I could think of no better means. Oh, do not be alarmed! You run no danger here. Take your measurements and satisfy your people. Then, let us part friends."

"Really, I am embarrassed. Do you mean to say that you contrived all this simply because you—wanted to know me?"

"Purely on that account. I would contrive a great deal more for the same pleasure."

"And do you insist upon my sending you a corset?"

"I earnestly request that you will be so kind."

Unable to repress a smile, she said:

"I need not measure, for I know the figures well, but really it is the first time I have ever taken such an order."

Gazing at her beauty, he inquired:

"Do you live at your place in Regent Street?"

"Oh, no; I live with a friend in Chelsea."

"Do you like the Opera?"

"Oh, yes; I love it."

"Will you let me take you there to-morrow night?"

"I should so much like to go with you because, although I've known you for such a little time, I've confidence in you. But it's overlate, and my friend——"

"Will not object when she knows that you are with me?"

She still hesitated for some moments, then consented, and so it was arranged. He would wait for her in St. James's Park, since it was Saturday and her afternoon was free. Then they would dine together and go to Covent Garden, where Melba was to sing.

"But dress?" she asked.

"Oh, we will take the places where it's not enforced."

She assented to this readily, and then, with cheeks aglow, she offered her hand to him as she said goodbye. He pressed it warmly, but discreetly, retaining it a moment while he gazed into her face. Then, when she had gone, he lit a cigarette. He had succeeded in inspiring confidence and the interview had been as he desired. He was excessively attracted and he knew he was embarked upon an adventure which might lead him far. But it must not take him farther than he wished to go. In this affair, as in the rest, he must never fail to dominate himself.

Punctually at six next day Ames was in St. James's Park, walking by the water's edge and glancing around in search of Claire. The sun, shining through a somewhat murky atmosphere, shed a pale gold light upon the gardens. The trees in their summer foliage stood out against a thinly clouded sky. Boys rowed upon the artificial lake and the ducks scrimmaged for the bread-crumbs thrown them by the children on the shore. An urchin fished for minnows with a string. The place was sufficiently reposeful, and Ames, in a happy, expectant mood, strolled up and down the bank, occasionally looking at his watch.

At length he saw a girl in dark blue silk coming towards him on one of the side paths. He recognised at once the symmetry and grace of Claire, and as she drew nearer he noticed the pleasure which her face betrayed. He knew quite well that particular expression which women's countenances assume when they are in the society of men from whom they expect love or sustenance, or both.

He led her to a seat. It was so charming of her to have come, so good to have had confidence in him, so kind! He knew they would be friends. He had known it from the first, and now he felt as though they were already old, old friends.

She listened to him approvingly and thoughtfully, and when he had finished told him some of her affairs, of her life when she was a schoolgirl with her parents, and the hardships which they had endured, of her choice of the business in which he had discovered her, because it was one that was conducted entirely by women, and in which the tyrannous shop-walker was unknown. She had risen since she had been there, she said. In a month or two, perhaps she would be *première*.

"How nice it must be," said Ames, "to pass one's days in enhancing and correcting Nature!"

"But it's no easy task. There are ladies who are never pleased."

"Not even when *you* attend to them?"

"Oh, no."

"They would like to equal you, and as they cannot, they're dissatisfied!"

She laughed.

"If you pay compliments like that I shall begin to fear that you're not sincere."

"And that would be very wrong."

"I hope so."

He looked at her for some moments without speaking, feeling himself drawn towards her by a magnetism which it seemed wrong to check, asking himself whether it would not be wise to secure so healthy and so beautiful a woman for a wife. Would the heavens fall if he married out of caste?

"But," she said, "there has been in my life a great misfortune."

"A great misfortune?" he repeated, scanning her anew.

"Yes, but I cannot tell it you. Some day, perhaps. Not now."

She had grown so serious that Ames thought it better to refrain from pressing her, although he was excessively perplexed. He told himself that it would not be very long before he ascertained what this mysterious misfortune was. They chatted for an hour longer, and then, when it was time to seek the restaurant, they strolled up to Piccadilly Circus, thence to Garrard Street, in which was the French hotel at which they were to dine.

All the while she was somewhat apprehensive lest she should be seen by some of her colleagues in the shop, or by one of the principals themselves.

"The girls," she said, "would worry me to death to know who my gentleman was."

He did not like the term "my gentleman," so he ordered the dinner without replying.

But when, a little later, he looked at her as she sat before him, her face a little flushed by the champagne, he could not help admitting that she was physically as fine a type as it was possible to see. At all events, her face was perfect.

But although Claire sustained the conversation, there came a stage during the meal when neither seemed able to find fresh themes. Many occurred to

Ames, but he dismissed them as unsuited to her scope, and for a brief moment he realised how drab existence might become when linked to that of a woman whose mind had been trained in the warping sphere of trade.

When the dinner was over, they walked through the French quarter to the Opera, where Ames had secured seats. As they were going up the staircase she asked him what the performance was. Not having thought of ascertaining, he did not know; but when they reached their places, and he procured a programme, he exclaimed:

"It's *Faust.*"

She started slightly.

"Do you not like *Faust?*" he asked.

"I like the music."

"Not the story?"

"It makes me sad."

He reflected for a moment. Then, to change the theme, he said:

"Look at that lady down there in that box and tell me what you think of her."

He handed her a glass and Claire looked through it at a woman glittering with diamonds who was leaning back in her chair and gazing at the stalls.

"Oh! I know her. We make her corsets. That's Lady Ventner. Very elegant indeed!"

"Is that the lady whose husband's mad?"

"I believe he is. But of course she does not speak to us of that. One day she asked me, I remember, to look at her figure and to tell her frankly if I could detect a fault. And I really could not."

Ames, looking through the glass, studied the pure curves of the neck and shoulders and the fine pose of the head.

He said: "She's rather thin."

She laughed.

"Are you fond of massive beauty?"

He whispered:

"No, I think that beauty should be just like yours."

This seemed to please her, but it did not raise the colour of her cheeks as he expected that it would, at least as far as he could see in the imperfect light. They watched the people entering the boxes and the stalls until the orchestra began the overture. Then they listened to the music, following the setting to it of the Faust legend, with its philosophy of evil, the longing of the withered doctor for the joys of love and his transformation with the aid of Satan into the youthful cavalier who leads the humble Marguerite astray.

The prima donna, who was young and sympathetic, played the rôle with great simplicity and charm.

> "Non monsieur, je ne suis ni demoiselle ni belle,
> Et je n'ai pas besoin de bras de cavalier."

Ames noticed that Claire looked down at times, and once during a love duo he was certain that her eyes were moist.

"Why," she asked in the *entr'acte*, "why must that beautiful Faust with such a lovely voice be wicked?"

Ames said:

"Because there would have been no drama if he had been good." Then drawing near to her he murmured: "Do you not see that in this Faust story there is a profound realisation of the love impulse, of the yearning which no one can escape? Faust is not really evil, but he is driven by this force too strongly for his power of resistance. He is attracted by the innocence and charm of Marguerite, and he is blind to the consequences which may ensue. And so it always is. When we are under the spell of love, we cannot think of anything beyond; we must fulfil our destiny. Here, in this story, then, is a mingling of true philosophy with ancient superstition. Satan and hell are fictions of bygone days. Love only is eternal."

"But," she said, "I hope you don't approve of the way Faust acted towards Marguerite?"

"No, of course it would never do if it became the rule."

But when the last scene came, and Faust's sonorous damnation was accomplished, Ames, moved in spite of himself by the ancient blame attaching to all Fausts, could not repress a feeling of dissatisfaction with himself for being engaged upon an enterprise which could not well be reconciled with any of the long-accepted views of commendable conduct. This feeling lasted until they reached the street, but it disappeared when he took her arm, and they walked along in quiet sympathy.

But Ames realised that in his position, with his schemes for the future, he must not lose time in aimless courting. He must discover, and that very night, what his relations to this enchantress were to be. Therefore, when they reached King William

Street, and she declared that she must hurry to catch the last of the Chelsea cars, he whispered:

"Miss that car. It is still early. I cannot bear the thought of losing you so soon. At home, the supper is all laid. I entreat you come and sup with me. Then I will take you home."

"How can you ask me to do that?"

"Did you not say that you have confidence in me?"

"I had."

"I cannot guess what I have done to lose that confidence?"

She shook her head.

"I believe in your good intentions, but you explained to me just now that impulses may sometimes be beyond control."

"But mine are not, so you may safely come. I certainly shall not think you a true friend if you refuse."

He had already hailed a passing hansom, and he succeeded in inducing her to enter it in spite of her reluctance.

"Let us," he said, as they drove along, "be really friends."

But she did not answer, remaining taciturn throughout the drive, gazing abstractedly into the street until they reached the house. Then when they alighted and he unlatched the door she stepped in listlessly.

As he said, the supper was already laid, and he asked her at once to take a seat at the round table, on which he had been careful to have placed a few of Benoist's edibles and some vintage wine.

"My man has gone to bed," he said, "so we shall have to serve ourselves."

She scarcely ate what he placed upon her plate and did not drink the glass of Pommery he poured for her. She answered, somewhat briefly, the remarks he made. He saw that she was not happy, and he realised that all that he might say to a woman in her frame of mind would be of no effect.

As soon as the meal was over, therefore, he rose and led her to an arm-chair. Then, placing himself upon a stool beside her and looking up into her face, he said:

"I asked you to come here because of my desire to be with you as long as possible, because of my esteem for you, my deep affection."

And in reality he was sincere. He felt at that moment drawn towards her irresistibly.

"And if I hesitated," she answered, "it was not because I did not want to come, but because I feared you would think less of me for coming."

"Ah, what a wrong idea! Do you then care a little for what I think?"

"Oh, yes—a great deal."

He drew closer to her.

"Claire—may I not call you Claire?—how good it is of you to grace my bachelor's retreat! By your presence here the place seems changed, and I myself seem changed. Instead of sitting over in that corner with a stupid book, I am lying at your side, my eyes rejoiced by the sight of so much beauty! Ah! why are you not here always? Why can you not be always here?"

She said:

"I am fond of clearness. I entreat you to say at once what you desire that I should be to you."

He was surprised by the directness of the question and was inclined to take it as a bid for matrimony. Nevertheless he answered promptly, but with a mental reservation:

"Whatever you wish to be."

He perceived that this answer had embarrassed her, which was what it was meant to do.

She said after a long pause:

"I will not be your mistress, and I may not be your wife."

Suspecting the truth, he simply asked:

"Why not?"

"Because I am not as you think and it is not in my nature to deceive."

He took her hand and whispered:

"Tell me all your little trouble, as a friend."

A tear glistened in her eye.

"Oh, no; you will think so ill of me."

"That, never!" he exclaimed, and again he murmured: "Tell me."

"Three years ago," she said, in a low tone and with evident suffering, "I was engaged to a Belgian artist. The wedding was arranged, the date was fixed. A week before, he asked me to go for a day upon the river. I trusted him, and went. He induced me to stay longer than a day and then he left me."

Ames, only partially surprised, inquired:

"And is that all?"

She understood his meaning.

"Yes, that is all—quite all."

"And since?"

"I have had no—love affairs."

He gazed into her face and was convinced she spoke the truth. On the whole, the information did not trouble him. Indeed, it was somewhat welcome, because it relieved him of a responsibility which he was not anxious to assume.

"How frank of you to tell me," he exclaimed; "but surely in such a case you have no cause for self-reproach. You trusted and you were deceived."

"But I do reproach myself, and greatly."

"Listen to me," he said. "You cannot live like that, ever at work without the consolation which all human beings need, without the incense which your beauty merits."

But she had sprung up from her chair.

"Oh, no, no; not that!"

She had taken up her jacket and was moving to the door.

"Well, but," he inquired, "what?"

"I know I am illogical. I cannot help it. Thank you for the Opera. Good-night."

Perceiving that she was determined, he opened the door for her, then followed her to the front door, which he unlatched.

A hansom was passing at that moment. She hailed it, and while Ames looked on in silence she jumped into it, gave her address to the driver, and after a second "good-night," accompanied by a saddened smile, drove off.

Ames returned to his parlour, and, throwing himself into an arm-chair, burst out into a laugh.

Marriage! She wanted marriage, that was clear, and he realised that if there were a thousand Claires, one more enchanting than another, nothing would induce him to marry one of them. But he was angry with her for having come, and, having come, for having gone; angry with himself for having been so deeply stirred and for being left with nothing more substantial than the recollection of her beauty.

He rose and paced the room. It was very well, but, while all around him were daily partaking of the feast of love, he, with his famous prudence or his virtue, was positively starving, and when, for once, he was about to do what was, after all, an unwise thing, this was how it ended.

He looked at the supper-table and at the chair in which she had sat. Then, with a shrug, he put on his coat and left. This, he determined, would be the last episode of its kind in his career. He had given way for a moment to the impulses of youth. In future he would be more circumspect—what the world in its hypocrisy would call more moral.

VI

When he awoke the next morning, Ames jumped out of bed, performed some exercises with a pair of clubs, and mentally pulled himself together, determined to shake off the experience of the previous night. Had he followed an inclination that was strong within him he would have written to Claire for another meeting, but that, his inner judgment told him, would have been unwise. Besides, was he not to dine that night with Lady Ventner? And would she not provide the best of antidotes to Claire?

All that day he worked with Sims on the journalistic scheme, which took a large place in his thoughts as the days went by, receiving the visits of master printers and describing to them the paper which he wished to found. Then, in the evening, he went to Portman Square. Lady Ventner received him with a shade of coldness in her cordiality.

"First," she said, "I must explain that the couple whom I had invited to meet you have at the last moment wired that owing to a loss they could not come. That is why you see me here alone."

She continued after a slight pause:

"Since I saw you last, I've read your speech at Shadley. After I had read it, I almost resolved to quarrel with you. I was surprised that, considering what you said when you were here, you should have uttered anything so red, so socialistic. It's simply inconceivable that a man like you should be your own enemy and ours."

Ames saw by her expression that she was in earnest.

"May I ask if you read that speech attentively?"

"Of course I did."

"And you did not perceive its dual aim?"

"Really, I must ask you to explain!"

"I would not explain to many, but I will to you. Power is passing from your hands into the hands of others, and in politics power is the real object of pursuit. If you run with the possessors of it you can hope to guide it, in a certain measure, to your ends. If you oppose it you are stultified or crushed. Not wishing to be either, I lean, apparently, at present to the side of the growing strength, the side with which your own must some day compromise or coalesce."

"Never!" she cried, with indignation. "Never shall we compromise with the curs who wish to drag us down, with the tyrants who are wanting to reduce us all to slavery; who would make the world one great drab place of mediocrity; and I'm astonished that you, with your artistic tastes, with the means which you possess of gratifying them, should even for one moment lean towards these *fainéants.* What little they possess has come to them from the suffrage system which was framed before it was ever thought that these bandits would arise. But we can alter that. We can make laws, if necessary, to check this socialism, if not to stamp it out, and it's to men like you we look to make such laws. Instead of that, you talk of countenancing this heresy for some far-distant end. Now I warn you that if you wish to be with us, to have a place in our set, you'll have to say, and clearly, which side you're really on."

Her face was flushed, and he perceived again that the spirit of partisanship was strong within her. He said, after a slight pause:

"Let us not talk of politics. Life, after all, has better things. And even if we do talk of politics, let us not take them too much to heart."

"But I do take them very much to heart. Are we not attacked in our very vitals? Do they not threaten to dispossess us—to take from us all that makes life sweet?"

Ames laughed.

"You need not be afraid of that. Their leaders are too fond of the sweets of life and don't want to be dispossessed themselves."

"Oh! then you do not take them altogether seriously?"

"Not more than they take themselves."

"I certainly admire the way in which you dispose of them, but I'm beginning to suspect that there isn't much that you think important."

"There, if I may say so, you are wrong. I should think it of supreme importance if I gained your friendship, and that is why I'm anxious that no politics should come between us. With your own artistic sense, which is evidenced by every one of your surroundings, you surely feel that politics must always be subordinate to art."

"But if we lose our means, how can we indulge in art?"

"It is precisely those very means that I am working to preserve to you."

"Mr. Ames, you are astonishing! One cannot tell what you really mean!"

Ames thought, "As long as you cannot, I am satisfied." He said:

"It's very simple. I mean precisely what I say."

"But what you say is not explicit."

"Forgive me, I will try to speak more clearly in the future."

The dinner was announced.

In the fine Corinthian dining-room Ames sat at the side of his hostess in a sufficiently happy frame of mind. It pleased him to be in this handsome house, with this well-born woman, who, in the light of the table lamp, her neck encircled by a string of pearls, looked soft and delicate and pretty. Once the conversation had deflected from the theme of politics, he did his best to prevent it from returning, and he spoke of the newest books and plays, perceiving, as before, that her judgment on these things was sound.

After a while he said:

"And you live in this large house quite alone?"

"Oh, no; I have a companion, Miss Sinclair, who happens to be away at present. You, I think, are quite alone?"

"Unfortunately, quite."

"Unfortunately?"

"Yes, I say unfortunately, because I am convinced that it is not wise to be quite alone in life."

Probably the presence of the servants prevented her from continuing upon this theme. She was silent for some moments, then she spoke about the weather. In the drawing-room, later, she showed him photographs of her relatives and friends, most of whom bore titles. Of a stately old lady with white hair she said:

"This is my mother, who died five years ago." Of a man of military aspect: "This is my father, who was killed in hunting." Showing the portrait of a man of middle age who resembled her, she said: "This is my brother, the late Lord Yare," and placing in his hand the portrait of a lady: "This is my friend, Lady Blake."

And Ames, who, though of good descent, had no nobility on his ancestral tree, looked at the photographs, conscious of a vexatious feeling of diminished personality. It was quite extraordinary how great was the power of these little words of titular distinction to lend a halo to the people bearing them!

"And this?" he asked, pointing to the framed portrait of a man of middle age which stood upon a cabinet.

"That," she answered, not without constraint, "that is my husband."

There was a silence while Ames examined closely the somewhat drawn and tired features and the rather vague expression of the eyes.

"How is he?" he inquired.

She left the photos and took a low arm-chair.

"He is to-day as he was yesterday, as he will be in twenty years, should he live as long—quite mad. That is the tragedy of my existence."

"Forgive me," said Ames, taking a seat beside her, "for having touched upon a painful subject. I did not know—I had only vaguely heard."

"His father was mad before him."

Ames thought: "And yet you married him!" He said:

"I sympathise with you sincerely. Yours is a cruel case!"

He gazed into her face and then continued:

"And are you not sometimes lonely, dull?"

"Of course I have many friends."

"And true ones?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then you are very fortunate."

"Have you no friends?"

"Many call themselves my friends, but I do not call them mine."

"Perhaps you ask too much of friendship."

But suddenly Ames had risen from his chair, retreated a few yards away from her, and then exclaimed enthusiastically:

"Oh, if you would only let me!"

She looked at him for an explanation.

"If you would only let me paint your portrait? In my experience I have never seen a face that would so well repay an artist's pains. I can see in my mind the picture I could make of you. It would be the best that I have ever made, because it has never been my fortune, up to now, to meet a face that so perfectly united the requirements of my especial *genre*. I thought your type had not survived the court of Louis XIV. I see that I was mistaken. Now, will you consent?"

She said at once:

"Oh, yes, with the greatest pleasure. I feel, I know that you would paint me just as I should wish to be."

"Just as you really are."

And it was soon arranged. She would give him at least two sittings in each week until the season closed, and he would do his utmost to succeed.

There remained, however, the important question of the place. Ames said that although, if she wished it, he would come to her, it would certainly be more in the picture's interest if she would come to him, since he possessed a studio with the needful light and the appliances.

She agreed that the argument was valid, yet she had some scruples. "What if she were seen?"

"Almost as soon as you enter my house," he said, "you become invisible to anyone but me."

"That sounds like a tale of 'The Arabian Nights.'"

"Well, come and see."

She promised she would come, stipulating only that she would not be kept waiting for a moment when she came.

"I have a man," he said, "who is the incarnation of discretion."

"And you won't talk politics while painting?"

"No."

Then they settled the details of costume and the arrangement of the hair, and he stayed an hour chatting with her, doing his utmost to amuse her. Surely this enterprise was choicer than any that had been offered him before, and he hoped that it would end in a satisfactory and pleasurable way.

When he reached home that night, two letters were awaiting him. One was from Sybil, reproaching him with having failed to come to her without so much as sending an excuse. The other was from Edith, and was an ultimatum. If he did not come and dine with her on the day named, she would consider that he intended to insult her.

He smiled as he sat down in the library to think the matter out. It was true that he had been guilty of great rudeness towards Sybil, but in reality he had forgotten all about her invitation in the preoccupations of the preceding week; and as to Edith —well, he did not want to go. It was significant, he thought, that both these women should have deigned to write to him again, that they should not have treated him in future with the cold contempt all women knew so well at times how to display. It was significant of the extraordinary power of the purse. Some amends, however, he must make, or these incensed ladies would surely seek to be avenged. Therefore he decided to write to both of them, inviting them for a cruise upon his yacht in August and promising to call whenever he had time.

The fact was, as he recognised for the second time, his existence was growing far too complicated. It would be well if he could simplify it, but he saw no chance of doing that. Its complexity, he feared, would not diminish but increase. That was a penalty he had to pay for using his wealth as he was doing now.

On the following afternoon he called at Jermyn Street, where the valet handed him a parcel.

He opened it and found a pair of stays, with a bill from Blythe & Geraldine.

Not a word from Claire. Merely the dry account. He would act in the same way. Repressing his desire to go to Regent Street and pay, in order to have an opportunity of seeing her again, he gave the money to the valet, and asked him to settle the transaction.

Those men were fools who could not shake off a love infatuation. Such men, he thought, were declining in numbers in the present age, when the phenomenon of love was scientifically viewed. All really forceful men, since the world began, had shaken themselves free. The old-style love tale or romance would soon grow obsolete.

The next day, which was appointed for the first sitting, Ames—after instructing Giacomo as to the visit he was expecting and ordering him to remain in readiness in the hall to open the door as soon as he heard a knock; after having prepared his canvas and his tools—waited in the library for his visitor. Punctually at three o'clock she came in a motor car, wearing a veil that rendered her unrecognisable.

Immediately she was shown into the library. Immediately, also, as soon as the door was closed, she was led by Ames through the bookcase panel into the Eastern room.

"Oh, how beautiful!" she exclaimed, as she looked down from the gallery; "but how mysterious! Do you paint many ladies' portraits here?"

"On my word of honour," he said earnestly, "you are the first that has ever entered."

This appeared to please her, and she descended the flight of stairs with a girlish step.

"I never saw anything in the East more truly Oriental!" she exclaimed, as she examined the carved wood and the arabesques, and glanced at the gilded dome.

"Here is your seat," he said, pointing to a square divan in the centre of the room, before which stood an easel, and drawing aside the red panes of the upper lights by means of a rope.

He helped her to take off her motor coat and veil, offered her a mirror to enable her to arrange her hair. Then he settled the position and the pose, and when all was ready he began to sketch. He had purposely set to work at once in order to inspire confidence, but when he stood before his easel, pencil in hand, he talked to her quite freely. It was so good of her to come; to give him this rare opportunity, which any artist would most surely envy!

"Do you know," he said, "since I left you the other night, I have been thinking of little but your portrait."

"Of my portrait?" she repeated, with a smile.

He whispered:

"Of yourself!"

"Of myself!" she reiterated, with a sudden movement of her body, "and pray, what?"

He laid down his pencil.

"I was thinking that you are the most complete expression of your sex that I have ever met."

She did not look displeased, although she said:

"I stipulated that you should not talk politics, but I think I should have also pledged you to abstain from—well, from saying what you are saying now. I do not like to be rated higher than my worth."

"Oh!" he protested, with a gesture of denial, "that is so utterly impossible."

She rose from her seat, looked at his sketch of her a moment, and then walked around the room. Ames feared that she might be offended, but presently she stopped before a coffee stand, took a cigarette from a tray upon it, lit it, and then sank upon the cushions of a divan in a deep niche.

Ames experienced again his old dislike of female smoking; especially on the part of one who was so truly an object of *virtù*. It seemed to rob her suddenly of a portion of her charm. Why *must* they smoke? When would they learn that the habit must impair their nerves, and that injured nerves means lengthened faces, tired eyes and brains? Smoking also, if they only knew it, tended to repel the male.

"No doubt," she said at length, "you're used to saying such things to women, and you're only half sincere."

He rose with a bound and stood before her.

"Surely you don't want to offend me?"

"Well, well," she said, "perhaps you mean it. I suppose I am distrustful. One becomes so in this life. And then I have been unfortunate."

"Unfortunate?"

"Is it not a misfortune to be in my position?"

"Yes," he answered, taking a seat beside her, "but it is one that cries aloud for compensation."

"Compensation? I have often been offered that."

"And you refused it?"

"Yes."

He drew nearer to her.

"But would you refuse it now?"

She closed her eyes and sent a puff of smoke.

He thought: "I wonder if she came here solely for the portrait."

However, as she was silent, he continued:

"Do you not feel, do you not know, that there are no two people in the world more fitted to console each other for the ills of life than we? Did you not guess that at our first meeting?"

Still she was silent, breathing deeply.

"Believe me," he pursued, "the meeting of affinities is rare."

"I wonder," he thought, as he was saying this, "if she has been told all this before?"

She threw away her cigarette and said, to his astonishment, like Edith:

"I liked you from the first!"

"Really?" he said. "How happy you have made me. Ah! how happy we will be."

He had spoken as he had in obedience to a necessity of youth; but soon he added up the cost. She was at least five years older than he, and was of the type, perhaps, that easily became what in French was called *crampon*, a grappling, which, once fixed, could not be shaken off.

She told him of her sorrows, how she had had four years of married life, and then her husband had been taken ill; how his condition had of late become so bad that it was almost certain he would have to be removed to private care; how hard it was for her to deal with agents and with lawyers who were working for their interests far more than hers. But now that she had found him he would help her. He was so intelligent, sagacious, so far above the level of most men she met, and they would arrange a happy life, a life quite full of satisfaction, and perhaps the future would be kind to them.

Ames, who had as yet committed himself to nothing definite, felt the rivets fastening upon him, but it could not be helped. He was embarked upon this enterprise, and he did not want at this stage to retreat. Indeed he felt a little proud of his afternoon's achievement. Men of his age, it seemed, must woo. It was a duty they owed distinctly to themselves.

She gazed into his eyes.

"I'm afraid we shall fight dreadfully about politics. No matter, it won't be a real fight with real enmity. I felt that even the other day when I lectured you at home, and I don't despair of making you see the error of your ways."

"Yes, that is it," said Ames, with a suppressed smile, "you will try to show me I am wrong, and I will only like you all the more for doing so. We shall be famous *friends*."

She looked at him again.

"I suppose you have been getting spoiled by many women?"

"In future, I hope I shall have eyes for only one."

"That is, you know, what I expect."

This time, however, he felt the rivet keenly, and for a moment he looked around as though seeking an escape. His movement was perceived by her, and a slight frown creased her brow. The charm was broken. He took up his pencil again and went on with the portrait. He had promised nothing.

VII

THE next day Ames attended the wedding of Lucy Penton at St. George's. He entered the church just as the bridal pair were walking down the aisle, the ceremony over.

She had well described it as a white wedding. She was in white, defiant beneath her veil. The sexagenarian was practically all white, save for his black coat and boots.

Mentally, Ames shrugged his shoulders. He did not like the sight of thwarted nature. The man was a fool and the woman a seller of herself. How could society, that banned irregularity, permit irregularity so great? For what could be more irregular than this discrepancy of age?

After contemplating a moment the crowd of onlookers, who seemed to think the whole thing natural, he jumped into his motor and drove to Eaton Square. He found Mr. and Mrs. Penton, beaming with the satisfaction of having accomplished a sound financial operation, receiving the congratulations of their friends with a beatific air.

Presently the bride and bridegroom stood in the centre of the drawing-room, objects, Ames thought, of the intensest ridicule, but kingly and queenly, for all that, as they received the handshakes of their friends.

When Ames approached, Lucy looked at him with a half-scornful, half-cynical expression, and when he congratulated her she merely introduced him to her husband.

Suddenly a thought occurred to him. Why not? The series of contrasts would be amusing.

"In August might I venture to inquire," he began, "if you will be in England?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, "we are only going to Twyford."

"If a cruise to Venice might tempt you, you would be cordially welcomed on my yacht. I have a little party."

He glanced at the bridegroom, who seemed hesitant. Lucy, however, answered promptly:

"We should like it very much. Thank you, we will come if you will let us know the date."

He promised he would write and presently withdrew.

When he reached the hall, he suddenly found himself face to face with Edith, whose acceptance of his invitation he had received the day before.

She looked at him reproachfully, although submissively.

"It was kind of you to ask me," she said, "although I must confess I did not expect you would. You have shown me so very plainly how negligible I am!"

She was looking well that afternoon, full and shapely in her plain dress of grey silk.

"If I had done that," he said, "I should stand condemned in my own eyes. But really you are mistaken. I have for you the deepest of regards."

"I suppose I must make an effort to believe. An omnipotence like you must always be believed."

He laughed and left.

The six weeks which intervened before the break-up of the season were the busiest that Ames had ever passed, although, in order to give himself time to elaborate his plans, he kept aloof from races, theatres, and bridge parties; yet he was so occupied with his political and journalistic ventures that he had little time to spare for the social functions to which he was increasingly invited. Moore had taken him round to several families of high importance in the social world, after borrowing an additional two hundred pounds, and especially to a house in which he had met a mother and a daughter who had interested him.

Elaine Hurst and her mother lived at Lancaster Gate in a quiet house at the corner of the square. They entertained but little, preferring to spend the surplus of their somewhat modest means in charity, to which the mother, a type of refined benignity, gave the greater portion of her time. Elaine was what Ames considered a success of nature, physically and morally. Although he only saw her twice, he was convinced beyond all doubt: (1) that she was permanently amiable; (2) entirely unselfish and disinterested; and (3) intellectually superior. Beyond this, purity itself. To visit her, he thought, was to take a bath in purity. Altogether, in an age of decadence, they were *rarae aves* in the land. Here, his wealth would avail him nothing. If he had wished to marry her and she had wished to marry him, such a marriage would have been sound and good. But for the present he did not care for matrimony. In his thoughts, he placed her on a shelf where some day he might look for her. On his present moral plane she was far above him. Besides, with her tendency to part with her possessions, his wealth, his talisman, would not be safe. Moreover there was Constance, who was in some sense an entanglement.

Yes, there was no doubt that his friendship was not to be considered lightly, and he could readily conceive that it might develop into something troublesome. However, for the time, he was quite satisfied. It was the necessary responsibility to take at that especial juncture. It brightened his existence and it had a good effect upon his nerves.

Nevertheless he saw with some apprehension that Constance had conceived for him a veritable passion, had become infatuated with him to the point of folly. And he thought it wonderful that this should be, considering how passive, unemotional she had at first appeared. But with women it was not always safe to judge by outward signs.

Twice a week she sat to him, and once a week she insisted on his dining with her at her house, whether she had guests or not.

Ames had no desire to complete the portrait which he had begun; but she kept him to the work, declaiming that she must have it in the Academy next year, and that she would love that everyone should see her name and his together in this way.

One afternoon, the work accomplished, as they were sipping the Turkish coffee which Ames had made with his own hands so that not even Giacomo should be admitted into the room, while she was lying, somewhat languidly, on the divan, smoking the eternal cigarette, she said:

"Do you know that I see great things in the future for us both."

Inwardly he winced. Why was she always talking of the future when the present was alone of interest to him?

"If only," she continued, "I were quite convinced that you were thoroughly sincere."

"Sincere in what?" he asked himself.

"You see, with your means and with my connections, there is nothing that should be beyond our reach."

Now, really, he felt grateful to her for the undoubted stimulus to action which she gave him, and he would not be unmindful of his debt, but if she must persist in this arrangement of futurity, she would end by causing him *ennui.*

"As much as I dare," she pursued, "I'm talking of you. I actually spoke to a Liberal peer about you yesterday, and he said that he would like to know you and, as you're aware, I'm on friendly terms with the Princess!"

She was displaying vistas to him, that he knew, and of course there was no doubt that she was influential.

"You are so good," he said.

She pursued after a pause:

"I was reading a book the other day, a novel by Alexandra Parks. It's the most revolutionary thing I ever read. She preaches nothing less than absolute free love, the gratification of desire, regardless of the consequence. She ridicules conventions and sets herself to break down all restraint. Her men and women are unfaithful just when they feel they want to be, and she excuses them, because they are fulfilling their duty to themselves! Have you read any of her books?"

"Yes," said Ames, "I read a part of one at the club not long ago. The woman has keen perceptions, is a consistent realist, and an artist in the use of words. But the theories which she endeavours to advance concerning sex relations, appear to me to be insufficiently thought out. After all, we can't be quite as fickle as the little dogs!"

"I'm glad to hear you say so. I'm convinced myself that there must be fixed relations between men and women, bonds that bind them to each other, if we are to have any manner of society at all."

"You're right, quite right."

Suddenly she asked:

"Talking of Alexandra Parks' ideas, what do you think are the obligations of a wife married to a man who's hopelessly insane?"

"The case is quite exceptional. The obligations of such a wife seem almost nil."

"That's what I tell myself. I heard to-day that he is worse."

"How long do you suppose he will survive?"

"Ah! that I do not know. Perhaps some years. I cannot tell."

Ames had resumed his place before his easel, and began to give some touches to the portrait with his brush. Could he bring himself to see, in the original, the woman destined one day to be his wife? Undoubtedly a marriage with her would be of social value, but, on the other hand, he did not think that nowadays there were many social bars which riches could not break, and after all, although she was a dainty and attractive creature, he was not inclined to think that she would suit. She seemed to have some love for him, but even that might prove, upon analysis, to be impure.

After she had left that afternoon he received a letter from his solicitor, whose advice he had asked through Sims about the transfer of some shares, and also as to the position of the Ventners. Winston, who knew, or had means of ascertaining, "how it was" with everyone, replied that the estates were mortgaged heavily and almost tenantless; that Lady Ventner was dependent chiefly for her income on the rental of some houses in Belgravia, the leases of which were falling in. This threw much light on her behaviour, Ames considered, and confirmed suspicions which had recently been forming in his mind. It seemed now almost certain that she was that mixture of interest and pallid love which appeared to him too common in the British Isles. Again, it seemed, he was being chiefly or partly wooed for his possessions.

His possessions? When he came to make a careful calculation, he discovered that his income was not greatly in excess of his expenditure, which increased by leaps and bounds. It was true that his mines were constantly developing, but on the other hand, his journal, in the first years of its life, would prove, no doubt, a sink. His yacht and his election were items of his budget of no small importance, and it was not a sound position to be spending income at his present rate. Happily the outlay, or a portion of it, was designed to reproduce. One day in the midst of his election, after he had spent the morning down at Shadley, breathing its stale air, he managed to find time to go to Jermyn Street, where he wished to engage in some private study quite unknown to Sims or to his election friends. There, upon the hearth, was the arm chair in which the goddess had sat that evening of the Opera, and there, on the side table, a little parcel, which contained the corset moulded to her form! How he would have liked to see her once again, for none of the women he had met possessed a moiety of her charm. But the price she asked was more than he could bring himself to pay. Curious, the scheme whereby men could not without the greatest effort rid their mind of the obsession of the woman who had once attracted them! Women knew this weakness of the other sex and used it for their ends. And women's ends were, after all, the ends of Nature which cared only for the conservation of the race and impelled men to preserve it by the frenzy they called love. And as he was thinking thus he remembered the words of an old song:

"Love was all a hum."

Yes, love might well be that; but it would never do to tell that to a woman, for the man who did would forfeit her esteem. Women were trained to believe in the transcendental nature of the passion, and their faith was fed, unto satiety, by scribes and poets.

But perhaps it was well that this delirium of youth, which he himself, with all his discipline, experienced, was thus maintained. Love, after all, was but desire, and a sentiment which somehow must pervade the universe since even atoms loved, since they were attracted to each other by an influence that could not be explained.

Dismissing these thoughts from his mind, he sat down to his writing-table and began to make an outline of his last electoral address before the poll. But the noise of footsteps overhead disturbed him. An art critic lived on the floor above and he was pacing up and down his room with a short quick step. Finding it difficult to concentrate his thoughts, Ames rose and imitated the art critic. After a few minutes, tired of this aimless pacing, he stopped before the window and looked into the street. Presently he saw a lady whom he recognised at once, in spite of a thick veil, as Sybil. To his surprise, instead of passing on, she stopped before the door, which she seemed to open with her own latchkey. A moment afterwards, he heard her enter and ascend the stairs. Then a door on the first floor closed and the noise of the footsteps ceased.

"Ah, well," he thought, "there is indeed a universal atomicity."

Sybil! And she was coming for the cruise upon the yacht! (What a curious collection there would be upon that yacht!) But after all, this affair was her private business and not his, and he had no right to reproach her for it. Possibly too much attention was bestowed on love affairs, which were not of course the only ones in life, and later, when he had more time, he would endeavour to determine the exact place they should occupy in life.

VIII

On the eve of his election, Ames told his audience of his deep concern for the welfare of the district, in which no human power would have caused him to reside, of his sympathy with their aims and aspirations, of which, not long ago, he had never heard, and of his fixed intention to procure for them the benefits which he was far from thinking they deserved. Never in his life had he felt so insincere. And what could he do but utter this election cant, the current coin of politics? He knew that if he had abstained from doing so his chances of success would have been jeopardised, in spite of all his liberality in the matter of new schools.

Therefore he pursued his policy of cant.

In the division which he was contesting the inhabitants were for the greater part tradesmen with progressive tendencies stopping short of socialism, of which they had no little dread, and Ames' *nuance* suited them. Perceiving that their chance was slight, the socialists, after a talk with Ames, who had demonstrated to them how all roads lead to Rome, withdrew their candidate, and the only adversary Ames had was a Unionist deficient in the power of clear speech.

All the afternoon of the election day, Ames sat in his committee-rooms at the hotel, talking with his supporters and deriving much amusement as he saw the fever of excitement into which they worked themselves in his especial cause, wondering how they could be so naïve. It was fortunate for him, he thought, that there were still men in the world who took things seriously and who could fret and fight over a political campaign in the success of which none but the paid agents had any interest that was in the least direct. Truly, as a French moralist had said, instinctive effort led men on.

"Well, Jones," Ames said, as the agent hurried in at three o'clock, "how is it going now?"

"As far as I can see we're winning." And the local magnate, who was standing by, expressed the same opinion.

Ames remained quite calm. In accordance with his method, he had accustomed himself to think of failure as a quite probable result, and had determined, in advance, the move by which he should oppose it. All was therefore for the best in the world which was planned for the ease and comfort of *beati possidentes*.

At half-past five the contest was decided.

Ames was elected by a large majority.

The figures were placed before him on the table and the fanatics, as he deemed them, who composed his council, gathered round him to congratulate him, and to shake his hand.

Presently there were sounds of cheers in the street below and Ames went out upon the balcony and gave a short address, in which he thanked the crowd of his electors for the confidence they had reposed in him and renewed his promises of zeal.

Then followed a banquet, which seemed to Ames unutterably tedious and commonplace, and before midnight he was at home again. A legislator! Giacomo was still up. "Io son diputato," he informed him; but the man already knew, and offered his congratulations in the best Italian style, bringing him a pile of letters and of telegrams.

Constance, who had preferred to keep away, had sent him a long letter. He was the cleverest of men! Her thoughts had been with him all the day. She only wished that she could be with him at that hour, but prudence had to be observed, especially as her companion had returned. Ah, if he had only been elected on the other side! But she was not distressed on that account. The time would come when he would change his views.

He tore the letter into little pieces with a gesture of annoyance. He did not like her meddling with his affairs and he resolved that henceforth he should tell her none of them.

There were telegrams from Sybil and from Edith in ordinary terms. But the message Lucy sent him struck him as peculiar. It ran:

"Congratulations, but I wonder if you're happy.
"LUCY."

Why did she wonder that? His happiness did not concern her. Happy? It was pretty certain *she* was not. He opened a few more telegrams and then, as he was tired, went to bed.

The next day he rose early. He had had enough for the last week of politics and politicians, and as he had made arrangements for a meeting of his followers the next day he was free for four-and-twenty hours at least. Therefore, after breakfasting and informing Giacomo that he would be away till late, he left his house and took the train for Brighton, where he passed the time in swimming and in walking, enjoying the fresh sea air after the atmosphere of London and amusing himself by watching the divers on the pier. While he was doing this, however, the sea washed in a dark thick object, which was soon observed to be the body of a man. As the police on the shore drew it in, and placed it on a cart near to Ames, a boy sang out: " When you've got to the end of this life, you've nothing to do but to die."

Ames returned to the Parade. He had not reached the " end of the world," as yet, and he did not wish to die, although he could quite conceive that the time might come when lassitude would overtake him and he wouldn't cling quite so tenaciously to life. Surely in the process of continued cogitation, of incessant churning of the same ideas, the mind must tire. Ah, well! these were the experiences of future years and it was useless to anticipate them.

Thinking thus, he was sauntering along towards Kemp Town, when suddenly he heard a woman's voice pronouncing his name. Turning around he found himself face to face with Dora Devereux, the little actress whom he remembered having introduced one night to Morgan.

" I've just been reading all about you in the paper and I didn't think to see you here."

She opened the journal she was carrying and showed him a portrait of himself.

Although he had purposely abstained from reading a newspaper that morning, he was interested and amused to see himself thus portrayed.

"And you?" he asked, "how is life treating you?"

"I'm married to the husband you provided."

"*I* provided!"

"To your friend Morgan, with whom you paired me off that night. Oh! I was in a fine rage then, but I suppose I ought to thank you now. He's not a bad fellow, though he's rather slow."

Ames laughed outright. Morgan had committed the biggest piece of folly that any man could well commit.

"Why did you not let me know?" he asked.

"Oh! Teddy didn't like."

Ames thought: "He wasn't proud of the espousal."

"And are you living here?" he asked.

"Staying for a week or two. I'm acting at the theatre."

"And where is Teddy?"

"Gone to town until to-morrow, so I'm quite alone. Won't you come and lunch with me? My rooms are over there."

And she pointed to a square on the other side of the Parade.

Ames thought: "She's ready to be faithless to her simpleton," and he declined her invitation, blaming himself for having acted thoughtlessly in introducing Morgan to her.

IX

A few days after this, the necessary formalities gone through, Ames took his seat at Westminster. A queer place he thought this House at first, full of illogicalities and strange complexities. The chamber could not hold more than a portion of the members at a time, and the most important questions were discussed to empty benches. The Cabinet was an oligarchy which treated the remainder of the throng with a lofty scorn and the party whips were the autocrats who ruled the rank and file. An anachronistic person in a wig presided over the debates whenever they took place, and there was a certain cleverness to be attained in catching this person's eye. The duties of the private member were for the most part ambulatory, since his time was chiefly occupied in moving in and out of lobbies whenever a division was announced. How the business of the nation could be conducted in this fashion was at first a mystery to Ames; but he perceived at length that there was an inwardness which had to be understood. All the same, he had been educated in a school of clear ideas, and this obscurity annoyed him. He was not very well received by the party to which he was acknowledged to belong, because they had some doubts as to his loyalty, and for a week and more he felt like a stranger in the land. The weight of the traditions pressed upon him, and he realised acutely that if he was to rise out of the common crowd, out of the flock of sheep, who voted at the party's call, he must exert himself in no half-hearted way.

He soon perceived that the quality most needful for success was that of clear and interesting speech, because it was essential, above all things, to induce the House to listen, and that they would not do to dullards, stammerers, or bores. Next, it was necessary to advocate a set of principles, and to shut the mind to all ideas that did not harmonise with them. Finally, it was of great importance to be versed in the methods of procedure. All this was plain to him, and he did not need it pointed out. One thing struck him as insufferable—the evening sittings. Was he to give up all his evenings to this legislative task? And if so, for how long? Truly he felt that wealth should have preserved him from this tie.

Gradually, as it became known that he was about to found a paper, he was more sought after, and some ministers looked on him with more favour than they had shown at first.

By the end of the first fortnight he was, therefore, in a fair way of becoming known. His desire was to make acquaintances in every camp, although he soon perceived how difficult it was to do so, without exciting a whole series of suspicions. It amused him at times to sit in a corner and to watch the play of motives as the speakers spoke, and to extract from what they said the grains of truth. A curious study, also, were the Labourites, these men who, from the mine, the workshop, or the desk, had been promoted to the dignity of legislators. A few had minds which were capable of taking a comprehensive view of things, but the majority were men of one idea—

the interest of class. They viewed all questions through the spectacles of Labour. One night, a loquacious demagogue, who had been drawing a picture of the wrongs and hardships of plate-layers and mechanics, suddenly exclaimed in a high-pitched tone: "And I 'ope, gentlemen, that you will never 'ave to bear such hills." The Whigs remained impassive, but the cavaliers upon the other side laughed heartily. Incensed, the speaker shouted: "You may laugh just now, but the time may come when you may 'ollow," and hereupon the Tory benches were entirely convulsed.

In the meantime, Constance was not idle. Since Ames had been elected, she had been more than ever fervent in her cult of him, and had organised a little dinner, to partake of which she had succeeded in securing the Opposition leader. Ames, of course, was glad to meet this mandarin, although he would have much preferred the meeting to take place in another house. At dinner Ames was seated opposite the statesman, and next to a German baroness who was passing a month in England.

"Mr. Ames," said Constance, addressing the ex-Premier, "can scarcely be unknown to you by sight, since you sit opposite each other, over there at Westminster."

Burleigh glanced at 'Ames.

"Yes, I have noticed Mr. 'Ames. Mr. 'Ames, if I am not mistaken, is the founder of a new organ."

Constance assented:

"And a future convert to our views."

Inwardly annoyed, Ames yet contrived a smile.

"Our views," he said, "are chiefly formed by education, bent, and the circumstances of early life. Can they ever be changed?"

The great man said:

"They should not."

"Now, really, Mr. Burleigh," Constance said, "do you mean to say you do not think that all the Whigs should cross the floor?"

"Oh, no, for if they did we should all be of one mind, and be in danger of becoming indolent from want of the stimulus which opposition gives. We should have no critics, and would grow too self-contented. It would not do at all."

The Baroness declared:

"There must be strife in politics."

But the leader did not wish to dwell upon the theme, and therefore he began a conversation upon art with the lady on his right. Nevertheless, when the dinner was over, and the men remained a short time in the dining-room, Ames easily perceived that he was of interest to Burleigh, who put him a few veiled questions, skilfully designed to ascertain the political complexion of his future journal. But Ames replied in general terms and Burleigh's curiosity remained unsatisfied. Ames said, however, as they were rising:

"I liked your speech last night immensely. That is a question upon which we must be all agreed, and really there are more such questions than is commonly supposed."

Burleigh assented somewhat dubiously, and thereupon they went upstairs.

It was singular, Ames thought, that this great man did not in the least impress him. Was it that he was incapable of thinking much of politicians? Perhaps. They certainly appeared to him parochially flat, and even those who were supposed to be the philosophers had replaced the universal view of things that the philosopher must take by one which was confined within the walls of party principle. Burleigh had wielded power, if any man had, in the State. He had grown grey and bent in Parliament, and he did not look as though he had derived much satisfaction from it. Probably it was because the power was responsible and bridled, and not that full free exercise of a man's own will which was so grateful to the mind. And he asked himself if this was the kind of power he was working to obtain. Well, no. It was too intermittent and too circumscribed. It had but the semblance of omnipotence.

It was plain to him, however, that, since he was a member, he must sometimes speak, whether he had anything he really wished to say or not.

Accordingly, one night, when a question of education came before the House, he contrived to draw attention to himself by speaking for fifteen minutes, not on the religious issue, which he preferred to let alone, but on the general inferiority of the instruction given in the schools the State provided or helped the public to provide.

He had made himself acquainted with the system by sending Sims to take notes, and had become convinced that, with few exceptions, the boys the school turned out were lacking in the most essential elements of science, and knew nothing about conduct.

Many, in handling this theme, would have caused the House to yawn, but Ames knew by instinct how to invest his themes with interest, and the result was he was listened to—less, he knew, for what he said than for the way in which he said it. While he was speaking, he felt himself sincere. He really wanted the reforms which he had been recommending; but when he was walking home that night he asked himself if he cared very much about them, if there really was such a virtue as sincerity when the welfare of others was at stake? How often he had pondered over "yours sincerely" at the bottom of a letter which was all equivocation! How many times had he not seen that sincerity to self was all that was in view?

One evening as he was walking up Whitehall after dining at the House, feeling singularly enervated from the closeness of the evening, suddenly, while he was noticing the throng of employees of both sexes hurrying homewards with the quick step of home-going slaves, he perceived among them Claire. She was walking slower than the rest with a somewhat tired gait. At that moment, in the twilight, at the side of the old Palace, she appeared to him more exquisitely feminine than ever.

She perceived him instantly and held out her hand to him at once with a smile of pleasure.

"At last," he said, "like this, by chance, we meet again."

"I was beginning to think," she said, "that we never should."

"Did you hope we never should?"

She shook her head and looked away.

"And how are you getting on?" he asked.

"I have been made *première*."

Yes, she had sterling qualities, he thought, would make a good and honest wife for anyone who had the courage to cast out prejudice and take her.

"I have often thought of you," he said, "since you left me that evening all alone. That little parcel which they sent is lying on the table still unpacked, suggesting—ah! suggesting you."

"I should never have gone," she answered, "and I have repented often since."

"It was so good of you to come."

As he said this he gazed at her, wondering whether she had found out who he was.

"Do you read the papers?" he inquired.

"The French ones, yes. The English ones—at times."

No, she had not read of his election or she would have spoken of it. She was far too frank to have concealed her knowledge.

"Why do you ask me that?" she asked.

"Because I thought you might have seen that a Belgian artist was killed in a duel the other day at Liege."

"It was the man of whom I spoke. There seems a fate in store for such as he."

"The Fausts," suggested Ames.

"The Fausts!"

"Well, you must not lose heart. *I* don't. I'm going for a voyage shortly till the autumn. When I return, I've a great plan for your happiness, a plan which has just been formed within."

And saying this he pointed to his head.

She looked at him as if in doubt. At length she said:

"I'm living now with a lady over there in Battersea."

Ames produced his pocket-book.

"Please tell me the address."

She told him and he wrote it down.

"Good-bye, and remember, I'm your friend."

He pressed her hand, and as he held it for a moment, loath to relinquish it, a brougham passed, and in it a lady in evening dress, whom he recognised as Constance.

Well, she had seen or not seen. Probably she had seen, since she was looking out of the carriage window, and possibly she might ask questions. No matter, he would know how to answer them. She had no right to assert authority, as she tended constantly to do.

His anticipations were fulfilled, for the following morning, when he returned home from his daily ride, he was informed by Giacomo, with an air of mystery, that a lady in motor dress, whom he had taken on himself to ask into the library, although she had refused to give her name, was waiting.

"Good," said Ames, and passed into the room, where Constance stood leaning against the mantel with her foot upon the fender.

"My dear friend," he exclaimed, in a half-reproachful tone, "how excessively imprudent!"

"No one but your Giacomo knew me, and he could not recognise me through my veil."

He waited for her to announce the object of her early call, but she avoided doing so, speaking of the dinner she had been to on the previous night, where she had met the fascinating Prince von Lindenbach, the young and handsome Austrian about whom the women were now raving. At length she said, as she lit a cigarette:

"By the way, as I was driving up Whitehall last night, I saw you speaking with some young woman."

Ames said simply:

"Yes."

His taciturnity annoyed her and she asked with some acerbity:

"Who was she?"

"A lady who possesses my particular esteem."

This vexed her more.

"That does not tell me who she is."

"No, and I'm afraid that's all the information I can give. I may add, however, that my relations with her are entirely platonic."

He spoke in a stiff and formal tone which conveyed to her his irritation. There were no ties between them that could warrant her inquisitorial attitude. Anxiety betrayed itself a moment on her countenance. She threw away her cigarette and came and placed herself beside him as he leaned against the books.

"Forgive me, I was indiscreet."

The matter ended, but that very evening he called at Sybil's, wishing to spend some time in the society of one to whom he was in no way bound, as a change from the interview with Constance.

Sybil regarded him, he thought, with a real admiration for his political success and he regarded her with unfeigned interest. But while he was in conversation with her and her sister a visitor came in, a stout man with a short beard and a conquering air, whom she introduced as Mr. Dalston, the art critic.

Ames recognised in this description his neighbour of Jermyn Street, whose name indeed he had once seen on a letter in the hall, and it amused him, knowing what he knew, to watch the couple pretending to be unfamiliar with each other. He plainly saw, however, that, whatever their relations might have been, Sybil was beginning to grow tired of the man. Perhaps the presence of Ames or the potential which he represented, was the reason why she seemed so inattentive to this artistic judge; for he knew as well as anyone the dynamic influence of wealth. One thing was certain, he would not have this scribe upon the yacht. It would be good for Sybil to be away from him. He wanted her on board for her magnificent appearance, but he did not want her followers. This man, moreover, was too arrogant and his artistic canons were diametrically opposed to Ames'. Besides, it was evident that none but a richer man than this appeared to be could give Sybil that elegant environment to which she was entitled by the right of beauty.

What masterpiece of painting was not in need of a frame to set it off? It was a pity, however, to see this girl wasting her youth in a situation that appeared to be without an issue, and he must really see what could be done for her. It was fortunate that, if he had the power of doing evil, he had also that of doing good.

He stayed only an hour, and when he left, Sybil came with him to the door, and as she said good-bye she gave him a long and earnest glance, such, he thought, as women keep for men of wealth and power.

X

The weeks that intervened before the voyage were spent by Ames in the study of the history of politics, in preparing projects for the winter, and in seeing the men who wished to write and to conduct his journal, which was not to start until the first months of the following year. Strictly he knew that he should not leave before the session was quite over, but as he did not mean to suffer in the cause of politics he decided that he would give himself permission to depart. He was quite sure his electors would not lose much by his absence. And if they were not pleased he really did not care.

One day he telegraphed to his captain to come up from Southampton, and a fair man, stoutly built, with light blue eyes and a sunburnt face, arrived next day. He was scarcely more than thirty, but had done much service in the merchant navy, and held a superior certificate. Ames, who had not yet seen the yacht, examined with him the plans which the builder had supplied, and received abundant explanations. When the engines had been discussed, Ames took the sheet on which the cabins were planned out and asked:

"What is this large room here?"

"That," replied Barnes, "is the largest of the state rooms. It is either for the owner or his leading guest."

"But," said Ames, "it communicates, it seems, with another sleeping chamber."

Barnes assented, and the owner further asked:

"Is there not a little cabin I might have at the farther end?"

"Oh, yes, right aft—a pretty little room."

"That," thought Ames, "will be for me, the other for her ladyship," and this conception so contented him that he invited Barnes to dine with him that night, to the captain's evident surprise. It was well, thought Ames, to please the man to whose skill you intended to entrust your life, and in any case one must become accustomed to the levelling of class distinctions which the future had in store. And after dinner, when they were seated in a box at the Alhambra, looking at the ballet with its tone of moving flesh, Ames suddenly asked the captain:

"Are you married, Barnes?" Saying, when Barnes replied he was a bachelor, "Ah! well, there is yet time," revolving for a moment a little project in his mind.

A few days before the date fixed for the departure, Ames went down to Southampton. He found his vessel to his satisfaction—a handsome steamer, painted white and gold, and admirably planned for comfort. His own French *chef*, who wanted a change of air, had come, and therefore Ames had no anxiety as to the fare. A doctor, whose acquaintance Ames had made one evening at his club, had promised to join the party, so that if anyone were taken ill there would be aid at hand. The naming of the yacht had given him some trouble. Although she had not said so, he knew that Constance half expected he would have given her her name. But that he had not wished to do, since everyone's suspicions would have been aroused thereby. Therefore, he christened her the *Exe,* the true significance of which he only knew.

On the morning fixed for the departure, Ames sat upon the bridge in a basket-chair, looking at the vessels in the harbour and reflecting. It was not, after all, a very brilliant party he had brought together, in spite of the additions he had made in the last two weeks of a poet, a musician, and a mother with two girls. No matter, the cruise was not to be a long one. After Venice they would go to the Piræus: then they would return.

The first to reach the yacht were the mother and two girls. They had been asked to lend propriety, and they had accepted eagerly, on the chance of winning the great prize which the owner represented. They were the widow and the daughters of a general, and had some pains to live up to the standard of their friends.

They were given a cabin aft, as they were good sailors, and did not mind the plunging of the ship. The mother, Mrs. Laird, was still young and prepossessing. The daughters, Kate and Cissy, were two fair-haired, blue-eyed maidens, not ill-favoured, quite alert and fresh, but painfully uneducated. Ames considered. If they had only known how poorly he esteemed them, how useless were their little flatteries and smiles, they might not have employed their summer thus.

Constance was the next to come.

Dressed in a blue costume, she alighted from a cab upon the dock, attended by her maid. She was looking serious, and when Ames went on shore to meet her she greeted him in forced and somewhat languid tones.

"I've chosen you a cabin which I hope you'll like," he said, as they reached the deck. "It's the largest in the ship." He thought it better not to go down with her, leaving to the stewardess the duty of conducting her below. After this, the guests arrived in quick succession: Moore, whom Ames had wired for the day before, thinking that he might be useful; Edith, Sybil, the poet Stephenson, a pale young man of means, with a taste for versifying; Miss Olane, the pianist; finally the newly married Lucy and her husband, and the doctor—eleven altogether, an ill-sorted lot, Ames thought, wondering if they would manage to enjoy each other's company.

At five in the afternoon, Ames gave the signal to depart, and slowly the *Exe* began to steam among the white-sailed yachts down the broad Solent, in her course towards the sea. The evening was fine and cool, and the guests remained for some time on the deck, watching the crafts and the river banks. Ames and the Count had a conversation on "Protection." Sybil and Edith spoke together upon gowns, while Lucy joined the group of Mrs. Laird, with the remainder of the party. But an hour before the dinner the guests began to disappear below, and at length Ames found himself alone on the after-deck with Constance, who had stayed there, as he knew, to speak to him. In a low tone she began, as soon as he approached:

"You've given me a nice room. Where is yours?"

"That is mine which I have given you."

"And where do you sleep yourself?"

"In a small place over there."

She reflected. Then she said:

"There is a cabin vacant at the side of mine."

"I know, and if you like, you can give it to your maid."

She said no more for a few moments, but he could see that she was troubled.

"This, I suppose," she said, "is to be a cruise of strict propriety."

"No, of anticipation."

"I see," she said, and bit her lip.

"On board ship," he explained, "one must be careful."

She shrugged her shoulders. He pursued:

"I thought of your reputation. There's not much privacy on board a yacht."

"As you will," she said, with some impatience. "We live in changing times."

He saw that she was hurt, and he felt a little grateful to her for letting the subject drop. She was evidently ready to begin an intimacy which he was anxious to avoid.

He tried to interest her in the scenery—the effects of the setting sun, and the gilding of the meadows and the darkening of the trees. In vain. She listened absently, and presently withdrew.

At dinner in the state room Mrs. Laird took the bottom of the table, facing Ames, who had Constance on his right, and Lucy on his left. If it were possible, Lucy had improved, Ames thought. Her face was graver, but more dignified. She was magnificent in her low-necked dress with a string of pearls around her neck, and Constance, older and less handsome, suffered by the contrast. The two women scrutinised each other somewhat closely and both remained, throughout the meal, reserved. Ames, in spirits, chatted easily, amused to see the eyes of the women fixed upon him when he spoke, as though his words had been oracular.

The conversation turned upon the chances of fine weather through the voyage. The night was calm, that all agreed, but the Bay of Biscay might be turbulent, even in a lightish breeze. And then there were joking speculations as to the numbers that would come to table should the wind arise.

"In such a case," the doctor said, "ladies are generally taken with neuralgia!"

But the Laird girls knew that they could dine in any hurricane, and Moore declared that he was never incommoded by the sea. The subject ended, because Mrs. Laird considered it inopportune at dinner. The Count was in an anecdotal mood, and insisted upon telling stories, in a German accent, of his travels in the East, with true Teutonic self-laudation. While he did so, Ames observed his wife, who listened with perceptible indifference to the stories, that she must have often heard. From the conversation he had had with him Ames had found this husband naïvely vain, wrong-headed to no small degree, loquacious to excess, and he felt inclined to pity Lucy, tied to such a man. Well, she had sold herself for station and for comfort, and society was but a mart where all was compromise and barter.

The conversation turned on Venice. Constance and Lucy had been there before, but Sybil never, and they both expressed surprise that a girl of her artistic tendencies should not have seen the gem of gems. But Ames, knowing Sybil to be poor, and unable to spend much in travelling, came promptly to her rescue by declaring that, in spite of all its charm, Venice did not attract some minds. Edith, who was next to Moore, owned frankly that she had never seen the city of the Doges, and the poet, who had already been there twice, promised her that she would be enchanted with its sights. Constance knew a lady who resided there the greater portion of the year in a fine old palace full of ancient memories, and Lucy said she would not mind living there herself.

Ames listened to their talk, thinking how colourless it was, glad when it was time to quit the table.

When the party went on deck again, the ship was quitting the coast of England, and dashing out into the ocean swiftly. There was no moon, and some heavy clouds obscured most of the stars. Some of the guests formed groups to sit and chat, while others preferred to roam about the vessel. Ames, glad to escape them for a while, went and smoked with Barnes in his little cabin on the bridge, and it was nearly ten before he left him.

He had scarcely reached the deck when he found himself face to face with Lucy, whom he could just distinguish in the dim light from the cabin window. The Count, the Lairds, and Moore were playing bridge in the card-room in the stern, and the deck appeared deserted.

"You could not be accused," said Lucy, "of too much attention to your guests. They haven't seen you all the evening."

"I have been thinking of their safety, all the same," he answered. "I've been questioning the skipper as to the behaviour of the *Exe.*"

"The *Exe!* Why *did* you give her such a name?"

"Because, not being married, I could not give a wife's name to the ship as many do. And so I called her *X*, the unknown quantity."

"How prudent, and how wise!"

Her tone was bitter, and though he could not see her face, he imagined its expression. They were leaning over the ship's side, and he drew a little nearer to her.

"Tell me," he inquired, "are you happy?"

"Happy? You know very well I cannot be! Oh, please don't think that I am wretched. No one is wretched nowadays. It's not worth while. With wealth, it's scarcely possible, but when you speak of happiness in the special sense you mean, I can only think you are sarcastic."

"Why did you marry him?" Ames asked.

"Because he, alone, would marry me; because marriage has become a mere arrangement of convenience dependent upon money. Women marry now for the sake of having recognisable establishments, and of keeping the pace of wealth. We are all afflicted with the same disease."

"You admit it is one?"

"Yes; incurable."

"And do you think that love, affinity, attraction, preference are dead?"

"I did not say so."

"No, you could not. You are too richly feminine to think so."

"What do you know of me?" she asked, somewhat defiantly.

"I know that you were never meant for the part you have been made to play, and that the playing it has cost you more than you care to own."

"Peugh! there are means of getting consolation."

"Yes, but you may find they are inadequate."

"You talk prophetically. One would say you knew the man I could have loved."

"I do."

She was silent for a moment. Then she asked:

"Have you, by chance, become as vain as the man I married?"

"If you think so, I am sorry. It may be I've become presumptuous and too fond of stating the crude truth."

"Well, and after you have stated it, what then?"

"Alas! I have no more to add."

"Remorseless, as you always were!"

This word remorseless caused him to experience a slight emotion. Here was a woman, after all, a woman of his class, who really had some love for him, for him and not for his possessions. It seemed a waste of something rare to throw away such love, but his *Daimon* murmured no. He must not take what was so plainly offered. Love was a matter of time and opportunity. If he had not asked her on the yacht she would have gradually forgotten him, as she must at length forget. She was ready now to do rash things, because she was beneath the influence of sex, which was but strong in youth, which age destroyed.

He remembered the day when she had left him in the library making him understand that he might repent some day. She thought that the power of her beauty would one day bring him to her feet. Alas! she judged him of the common clay; but he was of another composition. He loved something more than love. His passions were controllable. At the same time, she was far more beautiful than Constance, although much less influential.

Disturbed, in spite of himself, he said at length:

" No, I am far from that, and I am truly sorry that you should be dissatisfied with things as they present themselves. Believe me, a little optimism——"

But she did not heed him.

" Good-night. It's far too cold up here. I'm going down."

In an instant she was gone, and he remained for some time longer, looking out into the darkness and trying to calm his somewhat ruffled feelings.

What was it that had caused him to reject her? An inspiration towards another order of morality, or an anticipation of the better things the future had in store? Both, perhaps, but certainly the latter. He had a constant feeling that high opportunities were still before him, opportunities of greater power than he now possessed.

He left the place where he was standing, and began to pace the deck. Suddenly he heard his name pronounced, and on a bench behind the funnel he recognised two women's forms. Edith and Sybil were side by side.

" I must apologise," he said, " for this obscurity.

By some extraordinary oversight the lighting of the deck has been neglected."

"Oh, never mind," said Edith; "there are some on board who much prefer it so. Your poet over there and Miss Olane are having a fine time. But won't you take a seat?"

"Yes, between you, if you'll let me."

They separated so that he might sit between them.

"Now," he said, as he leaned back, "am I not in paradise? To my finger tips I feel your presence. There is a magic in the number three."

"I've no doubt," Edith ventured, "that you feel safer with two than with one."

She had divined his thoughts. He revelled in the feeling of security.

"Yes," said Sybil, "Mr. Ames' peculiarities are becoming known."

This was a pointed hit. He easily perceived that if his methods became known there would perhaps be an end to their success. It was wonderful how keen these women were! Therefore, calling sophistry to his assistance, he declared:

"Security! Is there security in any enterprise, in any tie, in any bond? No, my friends, believe me, all is hazard, and the wise man is not he who takes no risks. There is something in our nature that compels us to be hazardous. It is imprudent of us three to sit like this quite close together on this bench. A slanderer might pass and damage our reputations. We are always at the mercy of events. But do not let us talk of this. Do you not feel that we are human beings before we are men and women; that, above all, we are friends, and that it is a pleasant thing to sit here on this summer's night and dream?"

He took their hands and joined them, placing them between his own.

"Now, can you not feel that a current of warm sympathy has been established?"

Neither answered, but after a moment Sybil drew her hand away.

"Strange man," she said, and rose and left.

"Edith," he said, "you'd better follow her; it's getting late."

"Oh, very well!" the widow answered, in a tone of disappointment. "Your majesty shall be obeyed."

She left and he continued his deck walk. He had protected himself as skilfully as he knew how that evening, but in doing so he had, he feared, very nearly offended these three women. But women were so easily offended! Not to worship at their shrine was an offence; not to eagerly accept encouragement to woo when it was offered was another, and the greatest crime of all, it seemed, was to be independent of them.

He withdrew to his cabin and to bed.

The next morning when he went on deck the wind was fresh and the sea perturbed. The ship, caught in the great Atlantic waves, was rolling somewhat heavily. A seaman said that there was more wind to come.

Moore presently appeared.

"How much did you win last night?" asked Ames.

"Only a few pounds! The people here are afraid to play. The Count is the only one, I do believe, who can afford it."

"The rest were probably afraid of your superior skill. I wish, Moore, you would talk to the women more. They seem to be getting dull."

Moore smiled. "They're disappointed."

"Yes, why don't you marry one of them?"

"They're all as poor as I am myself."

"Do you not know that the best wife for a poor man is sometimes a poor woman?"

"No, I don't."

"It's true. A rich one may escape, become tyrannical. A poor one will often stay and scheme and plot, and work for the good of the *conjux*."

"I'd take the risks of the rich one, if I had the chance."

"Tell me," said Ames, "have you ever met a man who wouldn't?"

"Rarely, and when I have he was a weak example of his kind."

"And so you're fortune-hunting, Moore?"

"If you like to put it in that way—yes."

"I know a hideous old lady who is extraordinarily rich. She's a monster. Do you think that such a one would suit?"

Moore hesitated for a moment. Then he asked: "How much?"

"Oh! millions."

"Yes."

Ames looked at the horizon. Was there in the present world a man or woman in a thousand who was not attacked by the prevalent auritis, by the strange disease which threatened to destroy the fibres of human dignity, and to render men incapable of any but one fixed pursuit? He did not think so, and he was by no means sure that he was himself quite free from this subtle malady which might be contagious.

"Very well," Ames said, "I'll bear the fact in mind. I forgot to say the monster is engaged."

Moore shrugged his shoulders, but it was plain that he was annoyed. Ames took up a glass and looked at a vessel which was passing. She was a magnificent steam-yacht, larger and faster than the *Exe*, and on the deck he could see only two ladies. Probably the men were all below. There, he thought, was an example. The greater fortune bought the finer yacht. As he was thinking thus, the Stars and Stripes were suddenly displayed at the stern of the passing yacht. This was a salute, which the *Exe* immediately returned. Ames could not see the ladies well for the pitching of the ship, but one of them, apparently in yachting dress, was fair, and both were young.

They were soon past, however, and he thought no more about them. The heavy sea lasted almost till they reached Gibraltar, and the life on board was much disorganised at meals. Edith, whom nothing could affect, and the two Laird girls were the only ladies present. The remainder could not trust themselves at table, and passed a great deal of their time in their own cabins.

Constance was particularly indisposed, and was only able to come up at intervals and mostly in the afternoon, in spite of the doctor's treatment.

Sybil and Edith were much together, and Ames overheard the former say: "I wish I'd never come upon this wretched cruise." And he fell to wondering why she had accepted his invitation. A chance to be worked out, no doubt, was what had induced her to be there, and now that she had found it worthless she was regretting her critic and envying her sister, who had gone to Etretat with her. And when he thought that at first he had been attracted by what he took to be her artist's nature, he asked himself how long he would continue to accept appearances as realities. The elder of the Laird girls, however, came up to Ames and said:

"What a delightful trip we're having! It was *so* kind of you to ask us. How splendid it must be to have a ship like this to take you where you want to go! There's nothing I love like travel."

"Later on," Ames answered, "when your *Prince Charmant* appears, he'll take you in his airship anywhere you wish to go."

She pouted her lips at this and ran back to her mother.

On the evening before they reached the Rock the wind abated and the sea was somewhat smoother. Constance was able to stay on deck, and Ames had a seat placed for her on the bridge, where the motion was less felt.

When it was getting dark he came and sat beside her, thinking that if he did not, she would be too much hurt.

"What have you been doing," she inquired, with a suspicious glance, "while I was chained to my bed down there?"

"Not flirting, anyway," he answered.

"I'm glad to hear it, for I had been asking myself why you had invited Lucy."

He reassured her. As far as he himself was concerned Lucy was sacred to her *Graf*.

But even this answer did not satisfy her altogether.

"Sometimes I think," she said, "that you're not really fond of women."

He looked up at the sky.

"What man is not?"

"When we get to Venice," she inquired, "do you intend to go to a hotel?"

"I have not thought about it, but it might be done."

"Of course," she murmured, and he smiled.

"Look," he said, pointing to the west; "look at that conflagration! Is it not superb? What are all the efforts at embellishment which we call art compared to that great painting by the hand of nature? What, also, are our little joys and pains, our little loves and hates, in the whole cosmic scheme? To us it seems of the most profound and solemn moment whether we are loved or love, and nature does not care a jot for our loves, well knowing that it will continue to paint pictures like that one in the sky eternally, whether our race should live or die. Therefore, it has always seemed to me that we should not take life too seriously; that we should never chafe at disappointments; that we should always be prepared to take life as it comes, with its pleasures and its pains, saying to ourselves that just as for all the pleasures there is limit, so for all the pains there is a term. That is what we must impress upon our minds in order that we may be always ready for events as they present themselves. If we do this, we become proof against regret and we obtain the mastery of circumstance."

But Constance said:

"You are in a philosophical mood again. You're often in that mood, it seems to me. Whether we are something or nothing in the universe, our own concerns must be of the deepest interest to us. Women, at all events, will always think so."

"Women," he repeated, "will always think so—yes!"

Then she began to tell him of her plans for the coming winter, of her dinners of well-chosen friends and of a little trip to Paris which she wished to make at Christmas. Perhaps he would come also.

"To Paris!" he exclaimed. "You forget that it is full of English."

"Really," she said, "your prudence is sublime. There are hotels on the left bank of the Seine where no one that one knows is ever to be met."

"Sorry places they must be!"

She moved impatiently, but at that moment Barnes appeared upon the bridge, and Ames, glad of the opportunity to interrupt his talk with Constance, began to ask him questions as to the working of the ship and the time at which the land would be in sight. Barnes answered the questions clearly, but he was evidently intimidated by the presence there of Constance, who treated him with condescension.

The next morning, shortly before nine, the *Exe* anchored in the harbour of Gibraltar. Before they went on shore, Ames called a meeting of his guests to inquire how long they wished to stay upon the Rock, and, as they were unanimous in their desire to remain there only for the day, he decided to resume the voyage when the sun had set. The morning was spent in a ramble through the town so dwarfed by the gigantic Rock, and in the afternoon half the party went to see the fortress, while the remainder took a carriage and were driven to the Cork woods on the Spanish side.

Constance, Lucy, Edith, the doctor, and Ames composed this party, which was served with tea beneath the trees.

Ames had hit upon this means of killing the *ennui* which had begun to show itself upon the faces of these disappointed women, and the plan succeeded fairly well. When the latter reached the yacht again, however, and heard that Moore had taken *his* tea at the Governor's, they seemed to envy him, so that Ames concluded that Edith and Lucy, at all events, regretted the way they had spent their afternoon. This was an indication to be noted.

The next morning the vessel was steaming swiftly through the waters of the inland sea and making a straight course to Italy. The sky was brighter and the tossing of the ship had ceased. The guests regained a great deal of their equanimity and were beginning to make projects for amusement later on. The musicians played in the evening after dinner and the poet gave some recitations, upon which occasions Ames became invisible. They passed Stromboli in the night and found it in activity. The doctor and the Count, who were both geologists, engaged in a discussion on volcanoes which lasted from ten o'clock to twelve. Ames studied navigation with the captain.

At length they entered the Adriatic, and towards five one afternoon sighted the gilded domes of Venice. The *Exe* took up a berth not far from the entrance of the port, with her stern towards the quay. As she was getting into position, Ames perceived that she would be greatly dwarfed by a magnificent steam yacht at the side of which she was to lie, and on a closer inspection of this vessel he felt sure that she was the great white yacht which had passed them on the Atlantic. She was flying the American flag, and on the deck he thought were the two ladies whom he had seen through the telescope.

One of them, the younger, seemed less than five-and-twenty. Her round face, quite American in form and expression, was surmounted by a wealth of light waved hair. In her figure, Ames was unable to detect a serious fault. Her companion appeared to be about thirty, equally American in aspect, though of the dark Southern type. What the relations between them were Ames could not divine, although he fancied that the younger of the two was the more important. As the ropes were being fastened, both the ladies were watching the operation, glancing occasionally at the party on the *Exe*, and once Ames became conscious that the younger one was looking at him interestedly. Just, however, as he was glancing in her direction, Constance appeared upon the scene.

"Isn't it time," she said, "to think of where we are to stay? I've spoken to the rest, and some of them would like to go to the Grand Hotel, which is on the Grand Canal, and gayer than this dock. I've had my letters addressed there."

"As you will," he answered, and finally it was arranged that those who wished could stay upon the yacht, while the rest, comprising only Lucy and her husband, would remain at the hotel.

Accordingly, Constance, Lucy, and the Count went on to take rooms, Ames having said that he must stay to see the master of the port. When they had left, and the party had gone on shore, to be wafted round the town in gondolas, Ames remained upon the yacht.

The young American, he learnt from the port authorities, was the daughter of the multi-millionaire Josiah Yorks, who had died, Ames knew, a few years previously. Her ship, the *Lohengrin*, was one of the finest yachts that had ever entered Venice. She had retired below after the entrance of the *Exe*, but after Ames had obtained this information she appeared again, dressed in a light summer costume, with a wide straw hat. Evidently she was going into town, and was awaiting her companion.

Ames raised his hat.

"I beg your pardon, but I fear we have blocked your way to the landing stairs. I'm very sorry, but we had to go where we were sent."

This was the best means of introduction he could think of, and it succeeded, for she answered, smiling:

"It does not matter a little bit. We shall just go round to the other steps."

"I think," said Ames, "you passed us in the Atlantic. My yacht is a slower boat than yours."

"Why, yes, we do go fast."

Ames was about to make another remark, when the elder lady came up from below, all ready dressed to go on shore.

"Well," said the younger, "we must be off now to the museum."

But just as she was leaving, she turned and gave a little nod to Ames: "Good-bye."

He watched them leave the ship, and then he went on shore.

Proceeding along the labyrinth of narrow streets and little squares, overpoweringly close on this August afternoon, he reached the Grand Hotel, and just as he was entering the vestibule he met Constance, who was leaving hurriedly.

"I was going to telegraph," she said. "What do you think has happened? My husband died last night!"

"Really," said Ames, "how disappointing, just as you are on a pleasure trip."

"Yes, and I must return at once to see to my affairs."

"Oh, must you?"

Pleased at her departure, Ames said:

"I suppose you'll go back overland."

"To-night."

He left the hotel with her, and when they were in the street, she said:

"Ah! what a change this makes in my existence. Now I am quite free."

"Yes, yes, quite free," he echoed.

She gave him a sharp glance.

"Is that all you have to say?"

"By no means. I should add that when we meet again, after the trying time through which you will have to pass, there will no longer be the little feeling of restraint which perhaps afflicted us before. A widow and a bachelor!"

"Is that what we are destined to remain?"

"I do not know. I am unable to foretell the future."

They had reached a church with a wide peristyle, and she ascended its steps, making him a sign to follow her.

"Throughout the voyage," she said, in a tone of suppressed anger, "your manner has been strange. You know you have kept away from me, and what you have just said about the future confirms my—apprehensions. Take care! I'm not a woman to be trifled with."

"And I am no man to be threatened."

She saw that she had gone too far, and somewhat changed her tone.

"Before I leave, I ask you to assure me that I may trust your loyalty."

"Have I ever promised anything?" he asked.

"No, you are far too cautious, but you know, as well as I, that there are tacit promises between us."

"Now that's a theory I can't admit. In the hazard of London life we met for a season, and we helped each other to exist as friends. That season may be prolonged in the coming winter, or it may end, should either of us wish it. There is no tie, no bond; we are both free."

"Oh, that is it! You speak more plainly now. I have worked to advance your interests. You have been my sole solicitude; you know that I looked forward to be your wife some day, and now you actually tell me that our more than ordinary friendship was only of the kind which is contracted or abandoned, as one pleases."

"That is very nearly what it is, and what it must be."

Pain and disappointment were so plainly marked upon her features that he felt a slight remorse.

"All may be as it was before," he said, in a softened tone; "who knows?"

She was silent for some moments, evidently struggling with conflicting feelings, and he knew quite well that her pride and interest were warring with each other. After all, she was not without some prospects of her own. She was well connected and had influential friends. Someone would eventually wed her.

"I'm astonished at myself," she said at length, "that I should be urging you to do what you seem to hesitate—to shrink from doing."

"It's always an unwise thing," he answered, "to exercise constraint."

At this she seemed to take a resolution.

"You're right. I shall lower myself no more in my own esteem. If, when you return, you come to me, ready and anxious to act as you know you should, I will receive you with my former fondness. If you come to talk of freedom, stay away."

"I shall remember your words," he said, "and act as nature prompts."

They left the church and walked in silence to the post office, where Constance sent some telegrams to England. She had resumed her air of the *grande* *dame*, which she had laid aside when with him, and her tone was cold. When she left the office, she held out her hand to him.

"I must go back to the Grand, where I shall spend the day. My train will start at eight. Shall I see you at the station?"

"Yes."

Then, undisturbed, Ames strolled about the city for an hour, making purchases in the shops, and leaving his card on an absent friend. As he was walking through the arcades of the Piazza of St. Mark, he suddenly met Lucy with her Count. She said at once:

"Mr. Ames, we have to thank you, oh! so much, for the delightful cruise, and to say that we've decided to return by land. You see we want to visit the Italian lakes, and think this a good opportunity."

The Count confirmed what his wife had said, and Ames could only signify regret. He knew quite well that if Lucy took this course it was because she had discovered she had made a faulty calculation, and like most women was averse to spending time unprofitably. After a remark concerning Constance, and the expression of a hope that Ames would dine with them before the *Exe* left Venice, they hurried away to see the pigeons fed, and Ames resumed his walk.

He had a feeling that things were going well that afternoon. It was a pity of course to lose the *sight* of the beautiful Lucy, but Sybil was left, who had almost equal points. He looked at his watch. It was still early. He hastened to the quay, engaged a gondola with two men, to whom he offered double fare if they went fast, and he was soon speeding rapidly through the historic waterway to the picture gallery. Would they still be there? he wondered, as he entered the building. No, like Americans, they would probably despatch sights quickly. Hurrying through the rooms without looking at the pictures, which, for the rest, he knew, he was about to conclude that the owner of the *Lohengrin* had left, when he suddenly perceived her with her companion in a corner, busily engaged in reading "Bædeker."

Moving round by the side of the room, apparently engrossed in a study of the pictures, he reached the place where they were standing.

Raising his hat, he said:

"We meet again!"

"That's so," she answered, laughing, while her companion smiled.

"Is this your first sight of these masters?" he inquired.

"Yes, and it won't be quite the last. Are you fond of art?"

"Extremely. In fact, I think that I may say, *Anch io son pittore.*"

"Oh, then," she said, "you're like my friend here, Miss Vandek."

The lady thus alluded to explained:

"Oh, water colours only."

"I suppose," said Ames, "that you have travelled greatly and seen the art collections of the world?"

"Well, yes, I've been twice round this globe, and I think I've seen about all that's worth seeing."

"Twice already! You must be fond of travel."

"I just love locomotion."

"And speed, no doubt."

"There's not a motor in existence that is fast enough for me."

"At Venice, I'm afraid, you can't get much amusement in the way of motoring!"

"You haven't seen my motor boat? It's the terror of the place."

Ames laughed. Here was a really typical exemplar of the century of speed.

"Of course, you know," she added, "I like gondolas, too. To go about in one is just like slipping back three hundred years. It's all right for a week or so."

"It's a pity, Ada," said Miss Vandek, "you don't like quietude for a little longer than a week. You're much too fond of rush!"

But Ada gave a careless laugh.

"Oh, please, now, Susan, don't begin to preach!"

Ames asked if their stay was to be long in Venice, and they replied that in consequence of some repairs to the yacht's engine they would stay a week at the very least, especially as Senator Wigan and his wife, who travelled with them, had left for Padua the night before, and were going to Verona. Ames said that he, also, had some guests, but that a few of them were leaving him. He, also, would remain a week.

"We don't yet know your name," said Ada Yorks, and Ames produced his card.

She took it, and after reading it exclaimed:

"M. P.! Well, Mr. Ames, that's just as it should be. If a man's to be a politician, the younger he can start the better. And so, as we've got to shop, as you say in England, good-bye for the present. We're going to Murano this afternoon; I wonder if you'd like to come?"

Ames said that nothing would please him more than to visit the island she had named, and it was arranged that he should call for them at three.

They left, and Ames, after sauntering through the gallery and thinking over his chat with this vivacious person, was satisfied beyond measure with it, and he went back to his gondola with heightened spirits, telling the men they need not row so fast, and enjoying the urban scene.

In several canals he noticed warehouses that had once been palaces, and told himself that in these mansions had once lived the men who had practised *virtù*. Ah, well! he wondered if they had been happy. No doubt they had—those of them, at least, with whom the system had agreed. Did it agree with him? The future must be left to answer that. In the meantime he was pleased with the results he had obtained.

When he reached the *Exe*, the lunch was already served. As he took his seat, he quickly noticed a certain change in the complexion of the party. Edith and the doctor, side by side, were in joyous conversation, while Sybil and the poet appeared to be on the best of terms. The Lairds, on the other hand, looked glum, although Moore spoke to them, and Miss Olane appeared distressed. A process of natural selection was going on, Ames thought, and it was not to the liking of a section. They spoke of the places they had visited, and then someone said:

"That yacht, we heard in town, belongs to Ada

Yorks, the daughter of the great financial king. She's an orphan, fabulously rich, and moves about the world like that."

"Yes," said Moore, "I've obtained an introduction to her."

Ames had suddenly begun a conversation with the elder Laird girl, and appeared not to have heard this said; but he took heed of Moore's remark and realised that he must play his cards with skill. The men of the party looked annoyed, and were no doubt envying Moore's luck. Ames felt quite sure that the presence of this affluent American would disturb their equanimity and interfere with the interests of the other women of his party. It was not long before he had a proof of this, for presently Edith, who seldom criticised, declared that she had seen this Ada Yorks, and thought her horribly bad form. Sybil shrugged her shoulders and went on talking with the poet about art, and as Ames looked at her he could not help admitting that little round-faced Ada would never be compared with her. Ah! but Ada Yorks was fresh.

As soon as the lunch was over, Ames disappeared into his cabin, telling the steward that he wished to rest awhile and that he must not be disturbed. By the time of his appointment, he hoped that all his guests would have gone on shore; but when he went on deck he found it in the solitary occupation of Stephen Moore, who was busily engaged in drawing on a pair of grey suède gloves.

"Moore," he said, "I've a special favour to ask you."

"Granted, my dear Ames, of course."

"I want to ask you to go *at once* for me to 30 Via Santo Stefano and to inquire if an artist of the name of Allard lives there still, and if he does to bring him back with you if you find him in. He will remember me, since we were at school together, and I want to speak to him at once, if he's still alive. Should he have left, try to ascertain where he has gone. I would go myself but have an appointment presently. I shall probably be back by the time that you return."

Moore was visibly disgusted, yet he forced himself to say:

"Of course if it is urgent——"

"Oh, it is!"

"In that case, I had better go at once; thirty, you said the number was."

"Yes; so much obliged!"

As Moore was moving down the ladder to the boat he turned and gave Ames a suspicious glance. However, he said nothing, and presently he climbed the steps of the landing stage and moved away to the gondola station. As soon as he was out of sight Ames had himself conveyed to the *Lohengrin*, and he reached the deck just as the ladies were appearing.

"Miss Vandek has been scolding me," said Ada, "for taking you away from your guests the very day you have arrived."

"My guests," Ames answered, "are having so good a time in Venice that they can't begrudge me the great enjoyment which you have offered me this afternoon."

She smiled.

"Come along down, then, and, Susan, no more preaching."

The motor boat awaited them at the foot of the companion ladder, and in a few moments they were tearing through the lagoons, past island citadels and monasteries, towards their destination.

"A wonderful boat," said Ames, as he noticed the speed at which they travelled. "It braces the body and improves the will to go through the air so fast."

"Well, now that's exactly what I think," said Ada. "Mr. Ames, you've got a sense of things."

Encouraged by his success, Ames then continued: "And, after all, we must be of our age. The feature of these times is speed. The laggards have no business in them. All new means of locomotion give us greater power over space."

He called this talking largely, but he knew Americans were fond of rather high-flown speech.

"Of course," she said; "particularly when we know that in another century we'll be pitied for our sluggishness in this."

Then she fell to speaking of her life in Boston, of the Englishmen who came out there from time to time, "on spec," laughing heartily at the meaning which she seemed to give the term, asking her companion if she remembered that "*poor* Lord Blankly," who had spent a winter "of research."

"Do you share," asked Ames, "the fondness of a section of your countrywomen for the nobility of Britain?"

"I'm glad you've asked the question," she replied, "so that I may tell you right out, no. My father was republican in thought as much as name, and he made me promise that I wouldn't imitate the silly girls at home who worship lords. He needn't have done that. I'm not that kind of paste."

"I guessed it," Ames exclaimed enthusiastically. "You struck me as so different!"

They reached the island, landed and visited its church, which Miss Vandek admired, but which Ada thought deserving of only a hasty glance. Then they went to the glass factory, and were shown the process by which the famed Venetian glasswork is produced, the artificers at their furnaces, and the vases, necklaces, and ornaments, as they passed through their hands. This interested Ada, who in very fair Italian questioned a young workman with bared chest and arms as to the blowing of the glass, a feat which he performed repeatedly for her especial benefit. Then, afterwards, they inspected the museum of finished wares and made some purchases. And while Miss Vandek was buying an *épergne*, Ames and Ada strolled a little lower down the gallery.

"I cannot say how glad I am that we have met," he said, as they stopped before a glass case full of lamps. "The people on the yacht were so monotonous!"

"You have some very pretty women on the yacht, at all events," she said.

Ames assented dubiously.

"Prettiness I like combined with vivacity and charm."

"Some day," she declared, "you must tell me all about yourself, and I will tell you all about *my*self."

"My story is soon told. I was educated here in Italy. I studied art, became an artist, when a relative died who left me what I think you call a pile. Since then I have become a politician, and I lead a bachelor's existence."

"My history is not much longer. I was brought up in Boston, was my father's only child, and when he died I, too, inherited. Since then I've done nothing but take myself from place to place, seeking I don't know what."

"Seeking happiness, perhaps, like most of us."

"Yes; happiness that a few only find."

"Often because they fail to seize it when it is within their grasp."

But it was not in her nature to dwell on serious subjects long, and she soon exclaimed:

"I do declare, they've actually made a little man!" and she pointed to an impish figure in the cabinet which had been moulded seemingly in glass.

"A perfect little devil," Ames ventured, and they laughed.

"It's strange," he said, "I only know you since this morning, and yet it seems to me I've known you all my life."

"Well, Mr. Ames, I've much the same impression about you."

"That cannot be a mere effect of chance."

"P'r'aps not."

"To-morrow night," said Ames, "is the Feast of the Redentore, and if you and Miss Vandek will do me the great honour to come and dine with us on board the *Exe* we'll go afterwards in gondolas to hear the band on the laguna and to see the illuminations."

Ada clapped her hands.

"With pleasure, Mr. Ames," and she immediately ran off to her companion to acquaint her with the news, causing the glass to rattle in the cases as she ran. Miss Vandek accepted the invitation graciously, and they left the glass works with the project in their minds.

On the steps of the church they saw a beggar woman with a child, and Ames asked himself what Ada Yorks would do at such a sight.

She simply asked her companion for her purse, opened it, saw that it contained a few gold pieces, and emptied it into the lap of the poor woman.

"*Santa Maria!*" the latter exclaimed, and was about to rise, when Ames followed Ada's example and emptied his own purse into the woman's apron. She placed her child upon the pavement, gathered up the coins, rose and overwhelmed them with her gratitude, kissing their hands repeatedly. Never, probably, since the Middle Ages, when purse-flinging was a princely practice, had a beggar of Murano had so much.

"Is it not pleasant," Ames said, as they moved away, "to be able to command this means of giving joy?"

"It is. It makes one feel just regal."

"We are two potentates," Ames ventured.

"Yes, and that's all right. Since we both possess, we can be friends without suspecting each other of cupidity."

They reached the boat and embarked again. As it was still early, Ada proposed a trip in the other direction, towards the Lido, and they started off at the same pace, making deep furrows in the water and attracting the attention even of the passing gondoliers, accustomed, nevertheless, to foreign eccentricities.

Ames had asked to be landed at a stage near the post office, as he had a telegram to send, and accordingly he landed there after an extremely cordial leave-taking with both ladies.

At the post office he telegraphed to Winston as to the family of Yorks, merely for form's sake, because he knew, as all the world did, of their colossal wealth. Then, after a short stroll on the piazza, he went back to the ship.

There he found Moore pacing the deck again and looking extraordinarily gloomy.

Without looking at Ames, he said:

"I did your errand. The man died last September."

"Dead!" said Ames. "And I wanted to set him up in life."

Moore did not reply, and when Ames thanked him, he said, still without taking his eyes off the deck:

"Pleased to be of service to you, I'm sure."

Ames left his friend, informed the steward that he would not be there for dinner, and forthwith went on shore. He dined at a restaurant on the piazza, and afterwards walked to the station. Constance was already there, and in deep mourning. She was graver than he had ever seen her, and had not cast off her hauteur.

"I scarcely expected you," she said. "I thought that, as you left me alone all day, you might find it too much trouble to come here."

He excused himself as best he could; there was no appointment, and he had been busy.

"I have been thinking much of you to-day," she said. "You are standing on the edge of a social precipice. I should be sorry if you fell into it, but if you do you will have no one but yourself to blame."

"I should be so much obliged," he said, "if you would be more explicit."

"You think that wealth can brave and accomplish everything. Well, wait and see."

"One thing is certain, that without it, the other power, ancient prestige, declines and becomes impotent."

"It is wonderful how you calculate. One would think you were a trader's son."

"No, my father knew nothing about trade, unfortunately. He could not calculate. Therefore it must be supposed he was more of a gentleman than I."

"You are cynical," she said. "You think, no doubt, you can afford to be."

"Really, I have no such thought."

"Is it possible that you should be so cold!"

"If my temperature were taken now, it would be found to be above the normal."

She turned from him with impatience.

"Listen," he said. "In the present case there is nothing to be done but trust in the natural tendency of human things to arrange themselves in the best way possible. There are few of us who can mould destiny. It is foolish to fret for disappointment. Love is an antique passion no longer to be found in real life, and you know, as well as I, that we have often scoffed at it ourselves. Go back to your interests. Tend them well, and if, as I am sorry to feel sure, they are defective, then remember that in me, if you like, you have a friend."

She looked upon the ground and seemed to struggle with conflicting feelings. He guessed what was passing in her mind. He had let her know that he knew her need, and she was troubled that he knew.

Her maid appeared. It was time to take seats in the express, and they walked together to it.

Suddenly Constance had become mute. To some inquiries he made as to her journey, she assented with a nod, and when the signal was given for departure she stood at the carriage window and held out her hand to him without looking into his face, withdrawing the moment the train started. In another moment the express had disappeared, and Ames was walking back. It was a pity he was leaving her, he thought, for she really was an ornamental person, but he knew full well that he could never have made up his mind to marry her. No doubt, had he done so, she might have aided his advancement, but her aid would have been of a kind he did not like. It would have meant trammelled power and perpetual subservience. No, she was not the woman he required. No, she would not suit. Possibly she would become vindictive later on. Well, he must take his chance of that. That was a danger of the fight. He returned to the *Exe* and went to bed.

The next day at lunch he announced the Redentore party. He had engaged gondolas, he said, and had invited "our neighbours," as he called them, who were to dine with them before they left.

The announcement was received with no astonishment, but with some enigmatic smiles. The majority appeared to know what was arranged. Moore, Ames thought, must after all have introduced himself. Well, never mind, the chances of Stephen Moore were not of a too formidable kind. He felt again, however, that the women of the party were incensed against him and that nothing but their interests prevented them from showing that they were.

Edith remarked at length:

"I did not know, Mr. Ames, you were acquainted with Miss Yorks."

"Nor I," said Sybil languidly.

"Indeed?" Ames said. "Well, then, I am."

They perceived by his manner that he was not inclined for banter and they said no more. They could not well afford, he knew, to quarrel with their host. There was always an advantage in dispensing hospitality.

In the afternoon Ames, with the Lairds, strolled through the shopping thoroughfares and visited the Doge's Palace, while the doctor and Edith, Sybil, and the poet went off on an excursion to the Lido, where they wished to bathe. But as he was waiting for the family outside a milliner's, where they were making purchases, he was confronted by Lucy.

He raised his hat and was about to greet her, when she stopped, looked into his eyes, and said in a low tone, "I hate you!" and passed along.

At first he was inclined to follow her, but was restrained by a realisation of the danger of that course. If she said she hated, it was plain that she still loved, and he had only to take pains to win her.

No, he would not do that in spite of her transcendent beauty, in comparison with which all others sank to insignificance. Nevertheless the hate would easily really be hate if not converted, and therefore it was evident that there were rocks ahead. He was incurring enmities of no uncertain kind. No matter; he was not afraid. It was his fate in life to disappoint, and he must be resigned to doing so.

In the evening, after he had given special instructions to his *chef* for the baptism of an ice as *glace à la Ada Yorks,* he waited on the deck for his two guests.

They came as the clock struck seven, Ada in a white muslin dress, which made her look so girlish and so simple that it was impossible to think her the possessor of the revenue of ten ambassadors, and Miss Vandek in a rose silk gown, which suited her.

When he had introduced them to the party, noticing how eager the latter were, in spite of all, to meet her, Ames led Ada down to dinner, while the doctor was deputed to conduct her friend.

Moore, whom Ada had seen before that day apparently, was left to his own devices. The meal was gay. The cheer was excellent and Ames maintained the conversation at a level it had not reached before, appealing to Ada, on his right, for confirmation of what he said, and doing his utmost to amuse her. He knew quite well that the contrast was too plain between his vivacity that night and the somewhat sober air which he had worn upon the voyage, but he did not care, convinced he was on the most auspicious track.

When the dessert was over, a seaman came in to announce that the gondolas were waiting.

The party went on deck, and Ames distributed the guests in the two crafts. Edith, Sybil, with the poet and Moore, formed one party, while the Lairds and the doctor, the two guests and Ames composed the other. Moore had endeavoured to join the latter, but Ames had firmly intimated that he wished him to look after the other ladies, especially as he could speak Italian, which the doctor could not.

Then they started along the lagoons beneath a starlit sky, their craft bedecked with Chinese lanterns, their men singing boatmen's songs. Ames was seated at the end of the gondola close to Ada. The doctor, the Lairds, and Miss Vandek were rather nearer to the centre of the boat. Ada was more thoughtful than she had been the previous day, although she seemed to be greatly pleased. They reached the large pontoon, on which the band had already begun to play, and took a place with the other gondolas amid the crowd of boats which clustered round it, filled with people of all nationalities. The sound of the music enabled Ames to speak with Ada without being overheard. She said:

"I had a visit from your friend this morning. Indeed, he called yesterday afternoon after we returned, but I could not see him."

"Well," said Ames, "what do you think of him?"

"Oh! I've seen his type before. I've a large collection of them in Boston. They don't all call themselves 'The Honourables.' I should say a man with such a title ought to be the very best principled of men."

"And should you imagine that he was as you describe?"

"I think," she answered, laughing, "he has too great a fondness for *the chase.* No doubt he inherited that from his ancestors."

Ames joined in the laugh at the expense of Moore, who, in the other boat, was casting furtive glances at Ames and Ada.

"I am afraid," said Ames, "that in your position you must conceive a poor idea of our sex."

"Not of you, Mr. Ames, at any rate," she answered.

At that moment Ames made up his mind. That was all the encouragement he needed. Yes, his wife was found.

"Thank you for saying so," he said, with purposive simplicity.

The band was playing an air from *Rigoletto* and the boats were gathering around the illuminated stand in ever-increasing numbers. The air was close and still. He murmured:

"I'm oppressed with a fear lest we should lose you soon! How long shall you remain in Venice?"

"Well, Senator Wigan and his wife will be back in about three days, and then we're going to Algiers."

"It *is* as I feared," Ames said despondingly. "In a few days you will have vanished from my sight."

"Unless you come with us."

"With how much pleasure! But my party? I have promised to take them on to Greece!"

"Send them along to the Piræus in your little boat in charge of Mr. Moore."

"Certainly," said Ames. "A capital idea! It shall be done."

Then they exchanged glances, and Ames felt sure that she understood what the future was to be.

The night of the Redentore had been successful. The Lairds might glance at him reproachfully. Moore, in the other boat, might glare. If there was any confidence to be placed in the gestures of rich girls, he was as good as her accepted suitor. Of that he had no doubt, and he was satisfied. A dominant position was assured. It was agreed that no mention of the plan should be made to anyone until the arrival of the senatorial pair who were, as she explained, her second parents, and to whom she was eager to introduce him soon.

They stayed an hour longer, listening to the music and looking at the scene, and as they were reaching the yachts on the return journey Ada asked:

"Why do you call your ship the *Exe?*"

"Because Exe once represented the unknown. Now she shall be rechristened—a name which begins with A."

She smiled approvingly.

"I named mine *Lohengrin* in ignorance of whom *Lohengrin* should be. But now I think I've ascertained. Come early to-morrow morning and we'll have a spin on the lagoon."

He pressed her hand, and with his party moved round to the *Exe.* With wonderful unanimity, Ames thought, all his guests descended to their cabins as soon as they stepped on board, and he was left to pace the deck alone. There, in that vessel which loomed large and black in the half obscurity, would soon be sleeping the potential maiden with whom he was to pass his days in future. Did he love her? he inquired of himself. Well, he had a warm regard, and that was ample for the purposes of nature. Love was a sentiment for spendthrifts in most cases. Even kings habitually dispensed with it, when they made dynastic marriages, and who was he that he should demand more than they obtained? Luxury and power were benefits which lasted and ennobled. Love alone decayed. When would those foolish novelists perceive how far they were from the spirit of the times?

The next three days were spent in excursions to the islands and in visits to museums, and each afternoon Ames took tea on board the *Lohengrin.* Moore, who had been restless and depressed since the night of the Redentore, was invited on one of these occasions.

"What I can't make out," he said to Ames, as they were going together to the American vessel, "is how you came to know Miss Yorks."

"Is it not mysterious?" said Ames, with a quiet smile.

"I suppose you mean to marry her."

"Marry, Moore? Do you think that would be a good idea?"

"Of course, from a cumulative point of view."

"From many other points of view, I hope."

They reached the vessel. Ada said as they took seats beneath the awning on the after-deck:

"Why, Mr. Moore, you're looking ill!"

"Perhaps the climate does not suit me."

"You'll find the air in Greece much better than on these lagoons. I remember after a walk on the

Acropolis I had an appetite which was quite phenomenal. Please give my love to the dear old stones."

"I wish," said Moore, "that you were coming with us."

Ada smiled.

"It's kind of you to say so, but we are going in the contrary direction."

"Spain?" Moore ventured.

"No; somewhere, it may be, in North Africa."

Ames could not help admiring the resourcefulness of Ada, and more than ever he considered her a fitting partner. He was destined to become, perhaps, an adept in *virtù*.

At length the Wigans came back from Vienna, and on the evening of their return Ames dined on board the *Lohengrin*. He found the senator an intelligent and well-bred man of sound and moderate ideas, and at once he was on the best of terms with him. His wife was not less intelligent, and although both were grey, they looked still young. Ada explained that Ames was coming with them to Algiers, while his own yacht went on to Greece, because he might require to return to England sooner than he had anticipated and at Algiers he was within easy call. The Wigans accepted this explanation easily, and the whole thing was arranged.

The start had been fixed for six o'clock next morning, and Ada asked if that would be too early for Ames. But he declared that it would suit him admirably, that in the early morning they would obtain a view of Venice which would be unsurpassed.

When Ames returned to the *Exe* the whole party had gone to the theatre at the Lido and would not be back for at least two hours. What should he do? Should he wait and tell them of his leaving the next morning? If he did, he would but encounter the veiled sarcasms of the women, and, besides, he was already tired and wanted to " turn in." What could he do more for all these people than to place a yacht at their disposal? If any of them were too squeamish to accept such hospitality in the absence of the host, well, then they might go on or back by train. In his position, not one of them would have refused Ada's invitation. Therefore, why should he? As he was thinking thus Barnes, who had been spending the evening on shore, came up the side.

" Barnes," he said, " I'm leaving you to-morrow early. I'm going back on the *Lohengrin*. Now I want you to stay a few more days, say three, in Venice, and to take my party on to the Piræus, where you can remain a fortnight if they like. Then come straight back to Southampton. Here is a sum for ordinary expenses. My agents at Southampton will pay the crew upon arrival. If you will come down to my cabin I will give you a line for Mr. Moore."

Barnes took the notes which Ames handed him, and with a quiet smile followed the owner down below.

Ames wrote a short letter to Moore, in which he asked him to inform the guests of his departure, to express his hope that they would excuse him, and that they would have a pleasant cruise.

When he had written this, however, an inhibition prevented him from signing it. He read it over twice and then he tore it up.

" No, Barnes, I leave this matter entirely to you. As soon as Mr. Moore appears on deck you will please inform him that I am gone off on the *Lohengrin,* and that I hope that he and the other guests will continue the cruise as planned. That's all. And, Barnes, should they be very much annoyed and leave the ship, then of course you will return at once. In case of need you can address me *Poste Restante,* Algiers; but there's no necessity to say where I have gone. Do you understand?"

"Oh, quite," said the captain. "I suppose I may say you're sorry?"

Ames reflected for a moment.

"Yes, you may say that. Good-night, Barnes. I'm very satisfied with you. Some day perhaps you may have a bigger vessel to command. You must come and see me when I'm back in town."

Barnes shook hands with Ames and left, after wishing his master a pleasant journey on that splendid ship.

The next morning 'Ames was up at five, and with the aid of the steward, whom he warned the night before, was soon dressed and packed. At a quarter before six, while all was quiet on the yacht, he had himself and his luggage taken to the *Lohengrin,* which was already under steam. The American captain received him cordially, and he stood upon the bridge with him to watch the vessel quit the port. Silently she left her moorings at the side of the sleeping *Exe,* glided out into the waterway and was soon at full speed on the Adriatic. 'Ames cast a last look at the island city, on which the morning sun was shedding a rich light. There, midst the towers and cupolas, were the women who had wanted to appropriate him, and presently they would wake to find that the last remains of a forlorn hope had vanished! That was how wealth made destiny! He was thinking thus when suddenly he became aware that Ada was standing by his side.

"So early!" he exclaimed, as he pressed her hand.

"Why, yes. I couldn't let you come to my house and feel dull."

"So kind and so considerate."

They looked at Venice and he spoke of its former greatness, of the golden days of the Republic, when its fleets were powerful and its possessions vast. There Eastern and Western art were joined, there the fruits of the world were gathered. Then came Napoleon, and the proud city fell before him; next the unity of Italy, and Venice acquired a new strength in becoming part of the whole empire.

She listened to him attentively, and when he had finished speaking she remarked with a little laugh:

"Yes, unity is strength."

The next few days were days of much amenity for Ames. Relieved of the presence of the women he had left behind, he was able to give himself up entirely to his new plans. He was treated by all on board with the utmost courtesy and he felt completely satisfied with the step which he had taken. Winston had replied before he left that all was as well as it possibly could be with the Yorks estate, and therefore there was not a single cloud on the horizon. Even Miss Vandek, whose attitude towards him had at first been rather more reserved than he had liked, became extremely amiable and took great pains to insure his comfort on the yacht.

The senator, at first, was inclined to be somewhat inquisitorial, but Ames was careful to furnish him with proofs of his *bona fides*, as well as to give him a description of his mines, which entirely convinced the magnate, who was himself the owner of extensive mineral deposits.

Ada, in the satisfaction of having him on board, grew almost pretty, and he would often look at her and tell himself that after all she was by no means destitute of charm.

At meals the senator would generally talk politics with Ames, who took advantage of the opportunity to learn the working of the political system in the United States, a subject on which he was somewhat ignorant.

"You should not," Wigan said, "give too much power to your ministers in England. Neither in France nor in America are they allowed to be so absolute. It is a great mistake, a great mistake."

"I am entirely of your opinion," Ames replied; "and if a movement were originated to curtail that power I would be the first to join it."

"Even," Ada asked, "if you were a minister yourself?"

"In that case, of course, it would be impossible."

After the midday meal, the day after the departure, both the senator and his wife took a siesta and Ames and Ada were left alone on the upper deck where the coffee was usually served.

Ames thought it well to change the tacit understanding that existed between them into an explicit one. He said:

"Since I met you, I have had but one desire, one intention, and one aim."

Calmly she inquired:

"What is that?"

"To ask you if you will accept me as your husband?"

"Why, yes, of course," she answered.

He took her hand and pressed it to his lips. The bond was sealed. The future dynasty was founded. He was conscious of the feeling of repose which great decisions give.

A little later, when the Wigans came on deck, Ada told them what had been arranged.

"Mr. Ames and I," she said, "have become engaged and I'm quite sure that no one in the world can raise objections. Mr. Ames is rich and so am I. Together, I reckon, we should make a stir."

This was not idealistically put, Ames thought, but never mind, it would be a marriage of a modern type. Mrs. Wigan expressed herself delighted, but her husband was a little more reserved. No doubt, Ames thought, he meant to use the telegraph concerning him as soon as he got on shore. He was at liberty to do so, since he was no adventurer, but a very substantial man.

At Algiers they stayed at a hotel at Mustapha, and Ada had scarcely landed when she ordered a motor, and accompanied by Ames and Miss Vandek, began to explore the country. Each day after a ramble through the arcades or a visit to the Moorish quarter of the town, where they obtained occasional glimpses into Arab life which Ada kodaked, they went for what she called a run. These runs, however, were not to Ames' taste, and he did not think they ought to be included in the contract. He did not object to motoring at reasonable speeds, but Ada, in her rage for swiftness, was never tired of urging the chauffeur to approach the maximum. Ames felt that he had yet much to do in life and did not want to run the risk of spoiling or ending his career for the sake of mere velocity, and he was surprised that she, with her own prospects, should be ever ready thus to jeopardise her life. He suggested once or twice that the pace was dangerous, but in vain. She seemed unable to resist the fascination of high speed, and Ames resolved that after they were married he would abandon such imprudences at once. One night, too, at a ball given at the palace of the Governor, she danced so wildly with the son of an Algerian chief, who had been educated at Marseilles, that Ames began to fear there must be in her composition some element of impetuosity which he would have to study and, if possible, to eliminate. Miss Vandek, seemingly so calm, appeared accustomed to Ada's speed and, it was scarcely doubtful, derived enjoyment from it, and this caused Ames to meditate on the extraordinary contradictions of the female nature.

After they had been a week in Algiers, the senator's attitude towards Ames became more than ever friendly. It was evident, Ames thought, he had obtained information on his score and was satisfied with it. There appeared to be but to fix the time and details of the wedding. Ada said that at that period of the year most of her friends were in Europe and would not return before November, which month would be inconvenient for Ames' affairs, and it was ultimately agreed that the best place for the function would be in Paris, and the most fitting time October. All her friends would gather round her in Paris in the autumn, Ada said. In fact she had a relative who lived there all the year and who possessed a mansion in the Avenue Kléber. Paris was the centre of the world and it was impossible to make a better choice. That would give time, the senator observed, for the transaction between the lawyers on both sides of the Atlantic, and he proposed, with Ada's sanction, that the "contracting parties" should keep their respective fortunes, but that each should execute a deed bestowing on the other the totality of things possessed at his or her demise, so long as they were man and wife when that event occurred. Ames, after some reflection, consented to this plan, and then the senator disclosed to him the vastness of the Yorks estate. Ada, he said, had never yet spent more than a small share of her income, which exceeded five hundred thousand pounds. With what Ames had, he said, they would be one of the richest couples in the world.

All that was satisfactory, Ames thought, and after it was settled he gave himself up to pure enjoyment, feeling that the world was meant to be a pleasant place for him.

One day, as he was motoring with the two ladies, they passed at a high speed through the negro village on the outskirts of the town, and as they were approaching a white-walled hut a negro child rushed out and crossed the road in front of them, escaping the wheels by a hair's breadth. The parents, hearing the child's shriek of terror, came out and made threatening gestures at the car, which Ames had caused to stop. They found, however, that no harm was done, and with Oriental mentability began at once to laugh. During the incident, Ames had watched his future wife. She had appeared unmoved.

When they started away again, she said: "It was only a little black!" and when he observed: "I suppose you do not rank blacks very highly in the human scale?" she answered: "No, my great-grandfather was a planter and I think I regard them somewhat with his eyes."

Upon this Ames reflected on the singular haphazardness of marriage which committed a man or a woman to the perpetuation of an unknown or a half-known heredity. What surprises might there not be in store for the newly married? He had often been of opinion that a record should be kept of the characteristics of individuals and that it should be open to those about to marry, for many generations back.

At length it was decided to cross to France, and accordingly they embarked again on the *Lohengrin*, reaching Marseilles the day after their departure. A day was spent in seeing this cosmopolis, the meeting ground of half the peoples of the earth, and in visiting the famed Corniche, which Ada said was finer than any on the Riviera proper. Then they took the express for Paris, where they separated. Ada went to stay with her aunt in the Avenue Kléber, while Ames and the Wigans took rooms at the Elysée Palace.

And then began for Ames a life of shopping and of entertainment. The days were spent in purchasing the most beautiful things that money could procure in jewelry, in furniture, and ornaments, while the nights were passed at the theatre, of which Ada was extremely fond, at the Opera, or in dining at the houses of Ada's friends. Ames himself made no visits among the English colony, having previously, when a student, had experience of its narrowness and cant, and he did not call at the Embassy. He was much, however, in the society of scientific men and of artists, the only men, he thought, whom he might envy, and of a different type from the political politicians with whom he would have, it seemed, to pass his life.

One day after a tour in the Latin Quarter, as he was crossing the Pont des Arts, he perceived an emaciated man in faded, worn-out clothes, gazing dejectedly at the flowing stream. Recognising an old school companion, he placed his hand upon his shoulder.

"Mair!"

The man turned and gazed at Ames a moment before he recognised him. At length he muttered: "Ames!"

As he seemed unable to say more, Ames questioned him as to his life and circumstances and gradually elicited his story of misfortune. After leaving Rome, he had come to Paris and had given himself up, heart and soul, to painting. But either because he had not enough talent, or because he had been unable to obtain the recognition which was not willingly bestowed on foreigners, he had been unsuccessful, had fallen to a state of penury and could no longer even buy materials.

"Well," said Ames, when he had heard his story, "you're a lucky man!"

"Lucky!" repeated Mair, with a deprecating gesture. "How can you say that?"

"Yes, lucky I repeat, lucky in meeting *me*."

Mair looked up for an explanation, which was quickly given him.

"I, Mair, am well provided with the essentials of existence. I am an M. P., I am about to start a journal. Can you write?"

It was a few moments before Mair replied.

"You are prosperous! You are an M. P.! Ah, well! Ah, well! You ask me if I can write. You remember that in the old days I wrote for an art journal, but alas! after a year it stopped."

"Give up art and take to criticising it. You will not be the first man who has done that. If you can in any way satisfy my editor, you will be art critic and will have a retaining salary until we start."

Mair grasped Ames' hand.

"Is it possible!" he said. "I was going to throw myself in there to-night."

And saying this he pointed to the Seine, on which the carcass of a dog was floating.

"Instead of that," said Ames, "go and get a new outfit, feed up a little at Duval and then take a train for London. Here is five hundred francs. Come to me when you have brightened up, at the Elysée Palace."

Saying this he thrust the note into Mair's hand and hurried along across the bridge, as he was already late for his appointment with Ada and her aunt at the milliner's in the Rue Royale. He had been able to make one man happy that afternoon, and he felt somewhat elated at the thought.

Ada wanted his advice about an evening dress that she was ordering because, she said, he was an artist and she was not. At the fashionable modiste's, they had just finished an elaborate and sumptuous dinner gown for the Queen of Albain, and they permitted Ada to see it as an especial favour. Mrs. Adams, her aunt, a somewhat portly lady of fifty-five, with silvery hair and a pleasant face, thought the garment wonderful and Ames, appealed to, pronounced it in the best of taste.

Upon this Ada declared that she would like one not on the same model, but upon similar lines of elaboration and profuseness. The proprietor of the establishment said "Certainly," but added that he felt himself obliged to state the price, which was excessive.

"Well," said Ada, "I can at least afford as much as queens," and Ames wondered if she was going to develop this purse-pride, for it was not to his taste. But of course there was no knowing what she, or any woman, would develop in the course of her career. Ada had declared that in addition to a country house in England, for which they would search as soon as they were married, she required a château near Paris and a villa at Mentone, and consequently the consideration of the plans of properties and visits to those estates that were near Paris took up some time. Finally a country house at Noisy, in which Napoleon was said to have passed a week, attracted Ada's fancy and she acquired it, as it stood, with a considerable wealth of antique furniture. Ames knew quite well that she would seldom if ever use it, but the price was very moderate and he did not wish to contradict her at that stage. The villa at Mentone, or perhaps at Bordighera, would be chosen later on.

A few days before the marriage, Mrs. Adams gave a dinner in her palatial house and to it she invited all the *sommites* she knew. There were a minister and an explorer, two generals and a famous doctor, or, as the Paris papers called him, a prince of science, and their wives. The doctor and the minister were French, and the others were American, and there was a Spanish poet and an English peer, besides two couples from New York. Ames was profoundly bored, although he found a little compensation for the dulness of an evening among a host of strangers by having a long conversation with the minister on the trade relations of the two countries. The men, however, spoke to him with something akin to deference and the women looked at him with admiration. Probably, Ames thought, if he had been an ogre, or a *caput mortuum*, they would have done the same. A multi-millionaire was so eminently worth knowing!

When the evening was over and the guests had left, Ames stayed behind to take leave of his *fiancée*, who declared that he had scarcely spoken to her all through the dinner; so immersed had he been in politics. He knew that this was true, but curiously enough it had not occurred to him to speak to her. When he had anyone more intellectual to speak to, all Ada's charm seemed to sink into insignificance. He realised, however, that he must be careful not to fall into habits of neglect, because, although Ada's mental furniture was strictly limited, she possessed in such an eminent degree the power of acquiring and using the results obtained by the knowledge and the cleverness of others that she must be held to rank, in some way, with them.

Therefore he made profound apologies. He did not know how he could have been so wanting as to allow himself to be monopolised by that politician. His excuse was that he was a minister of the Republic, and therefore worthy of an attentive hearing.

Ada forgave him readily, especially when he had complimented her upon her gown, and he knew well that, in her own way, she was very much in love with him—no doubt, he thought, for the superior physique which his mirror told him he possessed. Women loved manly beauty, although, when poor, they would marry ugliness with little hesitation for the sake of sustenance. And in truth life was one long struggle, first for maintenance, and then for pleasure.

Now and then he thought of Constance, not without a certain feeling of regret. The English papers had announced his approaching marriage, but she had remained silent. Yes, for she had some dignity, and that was well. He admired dignity in women. No doubt she would be revengeful if she could afford to be independent, but really, in a soft age like the present, none had sufficient energy for so profitless a sentiment as vengeance.

From Barnes he received a letter dated from the Piræus. The whole party, after taking counsel, had decided to continue the voyage as originally planned, and they desired to convey their thanks through him for the pleasant trip which they were having. There was, Ames knew, a certain sarcasm in this method of conveying thanks through Barnes.

It was the irony of poverty, and he felt that it was fully merited. All the same, he would have thought more of them if they had left the ship *en bloc* on his desertion. But this, no doubt, their pockets would not let them do. Ah, well! it was all for the best in the best of worlds, and perhaps, relieved of his presence and the envy of his wealth, some of his guests might find mates on that yacht. If so, would he not deserve their gratitude?

On the morning of the marriage, Ames awoke with what he described to himself afterwards as a neutral feeling. He was neither very glad nor very sorry that it was his wedding day. In some respects he regarded himself as sacrificed, in others as a lucky man. At all events, he was resolved that he would go through the experience with philosophic calm and watch the march of destiny with a balanced mind. He had been somewhat puzzled to select a friend to support him on his wedding day. When he came to think about it, he realised that he had no friends in the truest acceptation of the term. In his youth at Florence, he had been too poor to have friends of his own class and his rise in London had been too rapid to allow him to form well-tried friendships. Therefore, Mair, his former fellow-student, would serve as well as anyone he knew in the character of friend. No doubt his air was still too solemn, but he had certainly enormously improved since the day he found him on the bridge.

Mair came early, before he had finished dressing, and Ames inspected him. He was fairly well turned out, and Ames complimented him on his appearance, telling him that if he would only brace up the muscles of his face he would be one of the best of best men. Mair said he would endeavour to play his part to Ames' satisfaction, but was sorry that he hadn't had more time for resuscitation.

But Ames took a small phial from his toilet table and handed it to him.

"Smell that."

Mair removed the stopper and inhaled the perfume, pronouncing it to be of extraordinary strength and fragrance.

"Does it not," asked Ames, "go right up to the brain and create a sense of ease and luxury, of sweetness and delight? A Florentine perfumer, a consummate artist, made it from a hundred flowers. Inhale it, it will comfort you."

Then, after Mair had taken a deep draught of the perfume, Ames produced a little red decanter from a drawer and a small liqueur glass.

"Here," he said, "is an elixir made by the monks of San Lorenzo half a century ago. Pour out a glass and drink it, then tell me if it has not given you new life?"

Mair did as he was bid.

"It's wonderful," he said. "It sends a thrill of *bien être* through the body. It exhilarates, exalts! Do you not take any?"

"No, I have no need for it. I'm not at all downhearted, I assure you, Mair. Please take another glass."

Mair helped himself again and then pronounced himself quite fit.

"In that case," Ames said, "I beg that you will go and ask downstairs if the Smeatons did arrive last night."

Mair left, and Ames began to take up letters from a pile which lay upon the table. There were congratulations from his political committee announcing the sending two days previously of a casket, and some letters of regret at inability to come from some of his more recently formed acquaintances to whom he had sent invitation cards for form, and there was a note from Lady Smeaton, which he had received the day before, informing him that she and her husband would undoubtedly be there, as they were going to San Remo and would stay in Paris for the ceremony. This was satisfactory. The Smeatons were the only guests for whom he cared, and he knew that Ada, in spite of all her independence, would be glad to see them there that day. Of the yacht party, to whom he had sent no invitations, lest they might have come and disturbed him by their presence, only Edith had written him a line. She, alone, had said that she was not surprised to hear of the event and hoped he would be happy. All the rest were dumb. Well, it was better so. A new life was beginning for him now and he could not see that they had any place in it. He thrust aside the letters and thought over the programme of the day. First there were the civil marriages at the two consulates and then the religious ceremony at the American church. He remembered with a smile that the senator had thought he might desire to be also married at the English church, and that he had had some difficulty in making him understand that all churches were alike to him and that one church service was enough for anyone upon his wedding day.

Mair returned and announced that the Smeatons had arrived and were staying on the floor above. He brought a telegram which had just come in. Ames opened the blue envelope and read, "Poor *arriviste.*" There was no signature, but the missive came from London. "*Arriviste!*" He knew the French term well. It was one for which there was no equivalent in English. An *arriviste* was an individual whose only aim was to obtain the good things of this life, regardless of all sentiment or even decency in the process of obtainment. The sender of that telegram desired to diminish him in his own eyes. *Arriviste!* He did not like the word, and "poor," in any case, was out of place. Of course this was an epithet called forth by envy or disappointment. Where was the man or woman in these days who was not an *arriviste* at heart? He had not found one yet. Only, not all succeeded at the game.

How very foolish of the sender to waste substance in wiring this senseless word! Mair was an *arriviste.* All men were!

"Have you ever been married, Mair?" he inquired suddenly.

"Married? How should I? Unless it had been to a model. For years I met no other women."

"Then you cannot tell me how one ought to feel upon the wedding day."

"Joyous, I should suppose."

"Quite so."

Mair laughed.

"You don't seem very sure about it."

"Oh, yes, I am. I'm not demonstrative, you know. You're certain that the Smeatons have arrived?"

"The manager just told me so himself."

"Good, good," Ames thought. He scarcely knew a couple he disliked more thoroughly than the pair and yet he was immensely pleased that they were coming to his wedding. No one that he knew would be more useful to support him against the coalition which would doubtless form against him later on, and he had invited them as a manner of insurance against it. It was very necessary in life to look ahead. He was thinking thus when a waiter entered and announced Lord Smeaton.

Ames finished his dressing speedily and passed into the sitting-room, where he welcomed his visitor effusively. His coming was a real mark of kindness and one that he would not readily forget.

"Really, I congratulate you," Smeaton said. "An admirable match, and I hear the young lady's very charming, very charming."

Ames knew very well that Ada's charm was the last of Smeaton's thoughts. If he had spoken plainly, he would have said, "I hear the lady's fabulously rich," but the cant of disinterestedness, the intensest of all cants, forbade him.

"Your marriage has created a great stir in town," said Smeaton. "It's the talk of the clubs. You're a very much envied man."

"They should not envy," Ames said. "It's extremely bad for the digestion."

Smeaton did not stay long and presently Ames, accompanied by Mair, set out on foot for the British consulate. It was a fine October morning and the air in the Champs Elysées was fresh and crisp. A few white clouds, high up in the blue sky, floated across the avenue, which was quiet and majestic at that hour.

"Do you see, Mair," said Ames, "marriage in our present social system is an unavoidable necessity. The bachelor is at a constant disadvantage. His celibacy is an unpardonable offence in the eyes of marriageable women as well as in those of their mothers, fathers, brothers, and the rest. He disappoints all hopes and aspirations. He is viewed as a rebel against a social law. The women end by shunning him and do their best to ostracise him too. When he is married, Mair, the conditions are all changed. He has chosen a woman for the post of wife, and in monogamy, as he can do no more, society is satisfied. That is one of the reasons why I am walking down with you this morning to the Rue St. Honoré to tie myself in marriage. It is a bondage, doubtless, but a bondage which is in reality a freedom."

"Yes, yes," said Mair, "we must accept things as they are established, if we would lead happy lives."

"Exactly, Mair; happiness is in a large degree dependent upon that."

They reached the consulate in the ancient palace of Pauline Borghese, and were shown into the room where the registration was to be effected, and after waiting a few moments they were joined by the Wigans, and finally by Ada and her aunt.

Ada, in a walking dress, was in a laughing mood and seemed to take the whole thing lightly. The remainder of the party, including Ames, were serious.

Presently the Consul, a man of military bearing, entered, and the formalities of a civil marriage at the consulate were speedily gone through.

When he had performed his office, the Consul, throwing off his official air, congratulated the young pair, and Ada said:

"Thank you, Mr. Consul, for not wasting time. I didn't know one could be married quite so soon."

The Consul laughed and the party left.

Two motor cars awaited them in the street. Ada and her aunt and friends drove off in the first, while Ames and Mair followed them in the second.

In a very short space of time they alighted at the consulate of the United States, where the same ceremony was performed.

Ames and Ada parted at the door.

"Good-bye, dear Lohy, until this afternoon," she said, "and, Mr. Mair, just see that he's in the church ten minutes before me."

Ames dismissed his motor, preferring to return to the hotel on foot. On the way Mair said:

"It's my turn to congratulate you, now. Really you are an enviable man. But why did she call you Lohy?"

Ames laughed out heartily:

"Lohy is short for Lohengrin, a playful fancy of no particular importance, a term I might say, of endearment. Women have these little ways, and I assure you, Mair, it's best to humour them."

"What I admire," said Mair, "is your excessive calm. When you gave your signature just now, you seemed as cool as the traditional cucumber."

"I was. I am always calm. Fortunately I can afford to be."

"Ah! that is it," said Mair. "You are like one of those great liners that move composedly through the roughest sea."

"Yes, it's perfectly unjust that I should be thus privileged, but it's the case, and, as you said, one must accept things as they are."

When they reached the hotel, Ames lunched with Mair in his room, and at two o'clock they set out for the church.

As they stepped out of the brougham, a little crowd of Anglo-Saxons greeted Ames with a cheer. After raising his hat to them, he passed into the fine edifice erected by the Americans for their cult.

The building was already full. The union of so much wealth had attracted a large audience. Ames took the place assigned to him at the altar of the church and looked around admiring the architecture and the floral decorations. A very good frame, he thought, for the ceremony and much less banal than he had expected it would be.

Presently Mair whispered:

"Now she's coming," and a moment afterwards Ames saw Ada in a cloud of lace and satin coming up the aisle, leaning on the arm of the senator.

Ought he not, he inquired of himself, to have experienced emotion at this juncture? Perhaps, but at any rate he did not. Was it that the bride was commonplace? He did not know, but he could not help realising that she did not possess the qualities of Constance in the matter of refinement. Well, well, a Constance was not always to be found thus gilded. As he was thinking this, he turned round slightly, and perceived Lord Smeaton in the front pew gazing at him with an expression of approval, and he knew quite well that his approval would have been less marked had Constance been the bride.

After a service to which Ames paid but little heed, the minister united him to Ada in the spiritual fashion, and pronounced a few words of exhortation and advice. Then to the strains of the organ Ames led his bride away. It was all over. He had accepted her and she had accepted him *coram publico.* They were trebly married. Now for the conjugal life.

When they were seated in the brougham and were driving off, Ada said enthusiastically:

"Lohy, wasn't it just fine?"

"Superb, Ada," he replied, wishing she would be a trifle less American.

"That's the best minister," she pursued, "that I ever saw in my life."

"Oh, wonderful," Ames said resignedly.

"And are you going to be a good husband?" she inquired. "You know I take this marriage business seriously."

"An excellent husband, Ada, I anticipate. I also take this marriage business, as you call it, with the utmost gravity."

As the drive was a very short one to the aunt's house in the Avenue Kléber no more was said, and presently Ames and his bride ascended the marble staircase of the mansion and proceeded to the fine Louis XIV. *salon,* where they took up their position in the centre in the attitude which had seemed to Ames so pompous at Lucy's wedding. Ada, however, appeared to enter into the spirit of the thing, and gave a hearty handshake to her friends as they came up to congratulate.

Lady Smeaton was affectionate, telling her how much she was looking forward to seeing her in London, and promising her a wonderful season in the coming year. Lord Smeaton was at pains to say nice things to her, and she afterwards declared him to be charming. The aunt made use of the opportunity to get herself invited to the Smeatons' when she was next in London.

Ames, with an amused smile, performed his part as well as he was able, studying the men and women as they shook his hand and detecting, on the countenances of many, that reverence for wealth which he had so often seen of late. But there was another expression which he knew as well, that which he had seen so often in his pauper days, the expression of contempt for poverty. He did not think that a man who had experienced such disdain could ever contemplate society through any spectacles save those of irony.

When the reception was over and only the intimate friends remained, the senator came up to Ames.

"I've only one regret, Mr. Ames," he said, "and that is that you're not a citizen of the United States, because we're going to lose our little Ada now."

The poor man looked quite sorrowful and Ames did not believe that he was grieving for the dollars which were going out to England, and he conceived for Wigan the feeling of esteem which was the first he had experienced for anyone that day.

"Mr. Wigan," he said sincerely, "we shall often meet again. The Atlantic becomes narrower each year."

This senator had sterling qualities, and when he came to London he would receive him well.

Then the party dined together early and, after much leave-taking and good wishes, Ames and Ada left to take the night express for Biarritz.

It was all definitely over now. Ames felt himself in partnership and he had a sense on the one hand of security, on the other of diminished personality. He wasn't now alone in life, but yet, it might be possible, he was too much accompanied. It was now to be seen how this conjugal arrangement was to work.

He passed his arm through hers and they both looked out of the carriage window at the traffic in the streets.

Then he whispered some endearing phrases in her ear and in gratitude she pressed his hand.

"Oh, Lohy, what a splendid time we two will have!"

This wasn't quite poetic, Ames reflected, but no matter, and it might be partly true. There was after all but one such day as this in a man's whole life and he ought to make the best of it.

In her neat brown travelling dress she looked almost pretty, and really, after all, her figure was extremely good. She satisfied, to some extent, those aspirations which are common to all men. It was curious, he thought, how little-girlish she had suddenly become as she leaned against him in the brougham, and it was difficult to realise that only a short time since she was a strong-willed, independent person, moving about the world, in a sense, alone. Would she return, a little later, to her former state? He thought it probable. With women one never could tell.

They reached the station and presently they took their place in the *wagon-lit*.

XI

A WEEK afterwards, Ames and his wife were sitting in a sheltered nook on the terrace of the Hotel Continental. It was a fine October afternoon. The sky was almost cloudless and the huge waves of the Gulf of Gascony were breaking proudly on the shore. A saline breeze was blowing from the sea. Ada was gazing, dreamily, Ames thought, at the horizon, along which a vessel in full sail was moving swiftly. Perhaps, he thought, she was growing idealistic and he studied her, wondering what thoughts were passing in her mind. She hadn't spoilt him in the matter of idealism, certainly. She had been natural, but unemotional, fatalistic and withal rather commonplace. Perhaps she was about to change.

She undeceived him quickly, saying:

"I don't like that red-haired chauffeur that we had to-day."

Ames prized the man for his excessive prudence, and he answered:

"He may be slow, Ada, but he's sure, and we do not want to be annihilated, do we, quite so soon?"

"That's true," she said reflectively. "To-morrow, Lohy, we will get horses and we'll ride."

Ames readily agreed to this and he promised he would make inquiries as to the possibility of finding mounts.

He said after a short pause:

"You're looking rather serious, Ada. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," she replied. "Marriage makes one rather quiet. Don't you think so, Lohy?"

"Yes, I do. One has a sense of human destiny. One feels oneself identified with Nature. There is a strong realisation of the chain of life; a greater comprehension of men and things. See those great white waves breaking over yonder on the beach. The noise they make is grateful to our ears, because we are in harmony with Nature's scheme. A week ago, no doubt, we should have been distressed."

"Say, Lohy," Ada said, "that mackerel *maître d'hôtel* we had for breakfast has given me a mighty indigestion."

Ames, brought down to earth at once, remarked: "Ah, yes, we are all so human!"

"If that's all you've got to say, Lohy, when I give you such a piece of news, it isn't much."

Ames rose.

"I'll fetch the doctor."

"Sit down, you silly Lohy. It's all over now."

"Marvellous creature!" Ames reflected. "The philosophising was too much for her and she found a speedy way to stop it."

As he relapsed into silence, completely at a loss for anything to say, she turned and looked at him.

"You're very clever, Lohy, much cleverer than I. You see, when I was a girl, I hated books. I liked to learn all about the world without them. Now perhaps you think me stupid, but if you do you're wrong. I can think and reason straight enough, only I'm not elaborate, you understand, that's all. And besides, in our partnership, I want to leave the cleverness to you and I'll admire you and praise you for it. You're my hero. I want you to be Prime Minister at least."

"For the country's benefit?" Ames asked, "or for your private satisfaction?"

"For my own contentment."

It was curious, Ames thought, how women loved to strut in borrowed plumes. It would be nice to be the wife of the Prime Minister, and no doubt she thought her father's millions ought to purchase the position.

"Suppose now, Ada, I were to give up politics. What would you say to that?"

"I would say it was very, very foolish of you. Why, some day, I want you to be made a lord."

"Now, that surprises me," said Ames. "You said at Venice that you did not care for lords, that you were thoroughly republican."

"That's so, as long as one lives in the States; but we're going to dwell in an aristocratic land, where we, as commoners, will have to take back places. I sha'n't quite love being sat upon by all those titled women."

At that moment she appeared to Ames as a future menace to his will. If she wanted to push him on a road he did not wish to take she would have to learn to bridle that desire.

"Very well," said Ames, "I'll make a note of that."

A waiter brought the mail. Ada eagerly seized the journals and opened them to see if they contained a notice of the wedding. To her delight, she found that most of the Paris correspondents of the London papers had devoted a little space to it.

"They say how I was dressed," she said. "They don't say how I looked. I suppose they thought me plain."

"They ought to have said," Ames ventured, "that you were looking at your best."

"How could they," she replied, "since they never set eyes on me before?"

"The Press is omniscient," he said, with a stifled sigh.

Yes, there was no doubt about it now; much of her independence had departed. Soon she would be all on show. She was preparing to climb, he saw that plainly, and to climb in a way that he probably wouldn't like. Well, well, he would have to see to it.

They rose presently and descended to the beach, stopping to witness the landing of some wreckage. Then, as Ada was not interested in seeing the spars hauled in, they moved along towards the point, not finding much to say. Suddenly Ames perceived an Englishman walking in the contrary direction, whom he recognised as Burleigh. Raising his hat slightly and making a formal bow, the leader passed them without stopping.

"Who was that?" asked Ada.

And Ames replied:

"The Opposition leader."

"Well, he just looked freezing," she remarked.

Ames assented with a nod. He felt certain that the rigidity of Burleigh was the first sign of the enmity of Constance. He would have to maintain himself against her influence. No matter, the stronger the opposing forces which would be arrayed against him, the greater would be his fighting zeal.

"What you've got to do, Lohy," Ada said, "is to become popular."

This continued "edging on" annoyed him. Who could have suspected that she would develop such proclivities?

"Popular?" he repeated. "Popularity connotes unpopularity. To be popular with one category of men is to be unpopular with another, and therefore it is better, when one talks of being popular, to distinctly state with whom."

"Well, I mean with the people in the front, of course."

"But those in the front to-day may be in the rear to-morrow."

"Not quite so soon as that."

"When a socialist becomes a member of a Cabinet he changes sides, whatever he may say, and the transition, Ada, is simply instantaneous."

"Oh, well, you mustn't puzzle me. I admitted you were cleverer than I am."

It was curious, Ames thought, that women must express opinions whether they understood the question in dispute or not. Undeveloped creatures, only a few were guided by anything but instinct.

A few days after this, they drove in a horse landau to St. Jean de Luz. Ames, feeling a return of the artistic spirit, wanted to make a sketch in the Basque country, and accordingly he selected a landscape which appeared to him of excessive beauty. Alighting from the carriage, he chose a spot beneath a tree and began to sketch. Ada alighted, also, and at first endeavoured to take an interest in her husband's task. It was not long, however, before she yawned. "How long, Lohy, do you think it will take you to fix that up?"

"About an hour, I should say," he answered.

Her expression of dismay, as she let herself fall upon the ground beside him, caused him to tell her that if she had not patience to remain she had better go on in the carriage and take him up on her return. To this she assented readily, and in another moment she was out of sight.

This, Ames thought, was marriage, an association in which, except at certain times, two beings bored each other. That, at all events, was what must happen when their tastes were different. He went on sketching, anxious to do justice to the scene before him and forgetful of the time. When he had finished, the sun was already low; he looked at his watch and found that nearly two hours had elapsed since Ada left him. Why was she not there? Had anything befallen her? Really, he hoped not. Because, although she was a Philistine, she was his wife, and in her own way was attached to him, he thought. He looked about him. The place was entirely deserted. He deliberated with himself as to what course he should pursue, and being unable to arrive at a decision, he sat by the roadside, reflecting somewhat sadly on the accidents of life. At length he heard the roar of an approaching motor, and presently he saw a huge vehicle coming up the road. To his surprise, Ada occupied the seat beside the driver, and there was another lady in the rear.

"Am I a little late?" she asked. "You see, I met Mr. and Mrs. Palmer of New York, who are staying at Biarritz, and who kindly offered me a ride, so I sent away that two-horsed van that brought us, and we've been for a delightful spin."

Then she introduced Ames to the Palmers, who asked him to return with them. He took the vacant seat, and they started off at a high speed. To Ames, this conduct on Ada's part seemed *inconsciente,* as the French denote it. She must have allowed the Palmers to take her for quite a long drive, although she knew that she had promised to return to him in an hour's time. And although while sitting at the side of Mrs. Palmer, whose husband he considered was imperilling their lives by the rate at which he drove, he appeared contented, he was in reality displeased, and he began to think that his wife presented all the aspects of a problem which would be difficult to solve. To have a wife of this kind was, no doubt, the price he had to pay for marrying without affinity.

They stayed three weeks at Biarritz, and when the day of departure came Ames was by no means sorry. He wanted to get back to his own home and his own affairs, especially the latter, which were suffering from his prolonged absence. They stayed two nights in Paris at the Avenue Kléber and then set out for England. It was a grey November afternoon when they stepped on shore at Dover, and Ada, who had only been to England in the summer time, declared it damp and dull, and Ames thought of his own impressions when he had landed less than a year before.

"Courage, Ada," he remarked, as they stepped into the reserved compartment. "You'll want some later on."

"As long as I am with you," she said, with a tender look, "I shall be all right."

On the journey she was somewhat restless, walking from one end of the carriage to the other, stopping occasionally before the window to look at the fields and meadows.

"It's a nice house that we're going to, I think you said," she inquired of her husband.

"Decidedly. But of course it's not a palace."

"But we might afford one, Lohy."

"We might afford a lot of things which it wouldn't be wise to buy."

"Why not, if they are nice?"

"You see," said Ames, "wealth is power, and if we part with our wealth unnecessarily we shall become weak, and others will gain a hold upon us which they do not now possess."

"Yes, but what's the good of power if it's bottled up? There's a lot of power comes from the possession of a palace."

Ames said:

"I know of only four palaces in London, and I'm afraid they're not to let."

She kissed him.

"Well, I'm only joking."

The approach to London was lugubrious. Suddenly the train dashed into a bank of fog, and the atmosphere grew denser as they advanced. Ada was silent for some moments. Then she asked:

"How do you breathe in this metropolis?"

"I don't exactly know, Ada. I am about as new to this as you are yourself."

They reached the Charing Cross bridge, and Ames vainly attempted to point out to her where the Houses of Parliament lay.

She asked:

"And can they really speak in such a fog?"

Ames said:

"They pump it out."

They reached the station after a long wait outside. Sims was there to meet them, and Ames introduced him to his bride, who, however, was too much occupied in coughing to give much heed to him. Ames exchanged a few words with Sims in a low tone, and then led Ada to the motor brougham which was waiting.

In a few moments they were at Carlton Terrace, and at home.

All the servants lined the hall to welcome their mistress, and Giacomo made a low and stately bow. The *chef*, in the name of the rest, expressed good wishes, and Ada thanked them for their welcome.

Her first act was to enter the dining-room, walk to the window and look out into the street, in which the lamps were but dimly visible, and as Ames joined her she remarked:

"I reckon we'll want a country house."

"And to think," said Ames, "that there are imbeciles who love this atmosphere!"

Then Ames took her to her room, which he had ordered to be redecorated in the colours she liked best, and she expressed herself as perfectly delighted with it.

"But where is yours?" she asked, and he replied: "Oh! mine is on the next floor. This is the only decent room on this."

"They build their houses in a funny way in England," she remarked.

"Yes," he answered, with conviction. "That's what I always thought."

At dinner that evening they were alone. Ada was somewhat quiet, and appeared scarcely at her ease in the new surroundings.

Ames said:

"I believe, Ada, you are experiencing the mental *douche* of London, the sobering influence which newcomers feel."

"Is *that* it, Lohy? Thank you for telling me. I didn't know."

There was a suspicion of sarcasm in her tone which did not escape his notice, and he fancied that he knew the cause.

At dessert she said:

"You had a surprise in store for me, what is it?"

"Finish your coffee, Ada, and come and see."

They rose and passed into the library, where she looked at the mezzotints and glanced at the books. He said:

"I am going now to conduct you to the East."

Then he opened the bookcase door and they entered the Eastern room.

She exclaimed when she saw the beautiful pavilion, lighted with yellow and red lamps suspended from the dome:

"Now, I do call this fine."

As they descended the flight of stairs, a strain of Oriental music greeted them, although there were no musicians to be seen. He led her to a recess, from whence the whole room was visible, and placed cushions for her on the soft divan. Then they listened to the melody full of cadences and rhythm, which seemed to come from a curtained niche on the opposite side.

Ada was silently waiting for an explanation, and presently from behind a curtain there appeared two men in gabardines and turbans, both playing the Egyptian oude. They were followed by two young and handsome Eastern women, gorgeously attired in silks and sequins, who, to the sound of the music, began an Oriental dance. Ames, through the agency of Sims, had ordered them from the Eldorado, where they were performing with a troupe.

"Lohy," she inquired, "are you a magician?"

He laughed.

"No, this is my private studio, and these are dancers from the music hall hard by."

They watched the slow and rhythmic movements of the dancers for some time, and when they had finished, Ames led them up the stairs and placed them in the hands of Giacomo. There was no more secrecy now, since he was married and, for the moment, fairly well contented with the state. He had initiated Sims by correspondence. When he returned to Ada he found her busily engaged in examining the place. She had just discovered the unfinished portrait of Constance, although it was hidden away in a recess. It was foolish of him to have left it there, but he had not foreseen that she would be so inquisitive.

She said:

"Why, that's the lady who was with you on the *Exe* when you arrived at Venice. Do you mean to say, Lohy, that you painted her down here?"

"I began to paint her, but I didn't finish it, and now I never shall."

"No, I wouldn't let you, not for worlds. I want you to paint *me*. But not down here. This place is too mysterious. I don't know what you used it for."

"For the best of purposes, I can assure you, Ada. But never mind, I'll paint you on the roof. I have another studio up there."

XII

Ames now commenced to lead a somewhat strenuous existence. The preparation of his journal and that of the next political campaign occupied him fully. He engaged an editor, a man whom he judged not only intellectually, but also physically fitted for the post, a man who had a wife and family to keep and who wouldn't be too much troubled by his convictions, for he regarded with some amusement those journalists who would rather die than sacrifice a particle of political allegiance.

"I want," he told him, "the paper to be earnest, very earnest; but I do not wish it to be in any way dogmatic. You, Mr. Edwards, must know well that truth can never dwell exclusively with one political *régime*. We are formed, however, to seek truth, and therefore we must support that side or party which at a given time appears to have the greatest share of it. Of course when I speak of truth, I mean an approximation."

Edwards said:

"But I'm afraid, if we vary in our politics, we shall fall between two stools. The paper will not pay."

"Whether the paper pays or not," said Ames, "is to me a matter of secondary importance. Nevertheless, I think it will, for we must take care that its brilliancy will be great enough to cause it to be largely read. I shall be responsible for the political direction. It's possible that some may think the title should have been *The Weathercock*, but let them think. Sooner or later, they will come to understand our views. I rely upon our foreign news to make us indispensable to those who wish to be well informed of what is going on outside of the British Isles."

"Of course," said Edwards, "if we can afford to be independent of the parties, we can go ahead, but it will be the first thing of the kind that has been seen."

"Which means that you consider it a rich man's folly. Well, I think you will be mistaken. By the way, have you sampled Mair, whom I sent to you the other day?"

"Yes, and I think he will suit."

And so it was decided. Ames gave to Edwards the direction of the journal, subject to his right of overrule, and it was expressly understood that Edwards accepted the editorship on this condition. Ames derived much satisfaction from the thought that his will would be supreme.

Socially, also, there was much to do. Although it was now winter, invitations poured in upon the newly married pair, and a wise selection of the best houses had to be effected. All the people whom Ames had met took care to call on Ada, with the exception of Constance, Lucy, and Sybil, who maintained a rigid silence. In spite of the unceremonious way in which they had been treated on the yacht, all the other guests, excepting Moore, came to Carlton Terrace. Edith had become engaged to the doctor and was already busily employed in preparing a London practice for him. There was even a rumour that Sybil was to marry the poet of means, although this was unconfirmed. Ames smiled paternally when he heard this news. Really it was to him that this mating was to be attributed. It was a pity if Lucy was to be lost in matrimony because, æsthetically, she was hard to match, and he realised that he had still a lurking fondness for her which might easily increase.

Ada was soon popular. Her unconventionality and lack of prejudice were allowed to pass, because of her superior wealth, and Lady Smeaton took her socially beneath her wing.

Nevertheless, Ada could not grow accustomed to the winter atmosphere and gloom of London, and it was not long before she began to seek a country house in one of the adjacent counties. This was not, she discovered, to be found too easily, especially as she demanded that it should have the name and the outward aspect of a castle with, if possible, a moat. Ames, however, objected to the moat, which he said was an anachronism and a nuisance in the present day, and they were contemplating building a castle in Sussex when the bankruptcy of a ruined earl enabled them to buy a seat in Kent with extensive lands. This possessed the advantage of not being too far from London. The motor, Ada said, would be the hyphen which would connect Kingslake Castle with Carlton Terrace. The furnishing, which was to be magnificent, was to be finished before the end of the first month of the year.

The day before the opening of Parliament in January the first number of Ames' journal was issued from its palatial offices in Aldwich to a somewhat expectant world. The night before, Ames had given a banquet to the staff, to the poor men who were going to sit up all night, night after night, to serve his ends, and he made them a speech in which he exhorted them to diligence in the cause of independence and of truth. Radicals they were, no doubt, in the sense that they meant to reach the root of things, but they were always to remember that their Radicalism was contingent upon the right direction of the party which upheld that doctrine, the right direction as interpreted in the editorial room. The paper was to be brilliant and original, and it was not to bow the knee too often to the idols of the day. Nevertheless, they were to remember that the public, taken as a whole, was dense and sheeplike and that they must not perplex or startle it too much. If any of them were at any time in doubt as to the policy to be pursued, Mr. Edwards and himself would be ever ready to explain. In politics, the voting list would clearly indicate to them his views from day to day. At the outset it was essential to avoid direct expression of the paper's policy.

From this conclave, the Press was rigorously excluded. It was the gathering, as Ames himself declared, of a band of workers who would leave their mark in the annals of their time. Although they were all paid higher salaries than was the rule, Ames pitied them in secret. There would be some, no doubt, who would use the paper as the stepping stone, but the majority were hopelessly condemned to nerve-wearing and brain-wrecking toil for the remainder of their lives, whether they stayed with him or not.

Mair was at the banquet in the best of spirits.

He was thinking of taking a studio in Chelsea, and was delighted that he had returned to England, where his work would be more appreciated than abroad. But Ames said to him:

"My friend, take my advice. Criticise but don't produce."

The first number, which was a numerical success, was written from a lofty standpoint; its articles denoted clearly the intention of the founder to examine and to probe in the public interest. It appeared as a menace to the upholders of inconsistencies and shams. It was imbued with a scientific spirit.

The congratulations which Ames received upon it were mostly from men of independent minds, for the servants of custom and men of reverential tendencies were inclined to look at it askance. It was something that they dared not imitate, something that they did not like to see.

When Ames went to the House in the evening, one of the first men he met was Burleigh, who passed him with the merest nod. And even those of the party to which he was supposed to belong, whose acquaintance he had made, kept somewhat aloof from him as though suspicious. The demagogues, themselves, were cautious and reserved in speaking with him, although it was evident that they were not without some distant hopes of his espousal of their cause. All, in fact, to whatever party they belonged, appeared afraid to be either his friends or enemies, and owing to a peculiar mental twist this attitude of theirs caused him satisfaction. Sooner or later, he believed, they would have to recognise him as the power that he was.

Through an Irishman, with whom he had formed a kind of friendship in the previous session, he learnt that all sorts of rumours were afloat as to his intentions and that the Tories, for some unknown reason, were especially opposed to him. They were afraid, Ames thought, that he was about to use the wealth which all knew him to possess against the moneyed class. They might have waited a little longer, he considered, before forming that conclusion.

It was plain to Ames that although profit on the journalistic undertaking was not what he sought, it was, nevertheless, essential that his organ should be widely read if it was to be influential. Consequently, after the first few numbers, he directed that the paper should be as little political as possible in its leading articles, for a while, at least, until he had had time to take his bearings. This plan succeeded fairly well and gradually he increased the number of his acquaintances on the side which he was understood to favour. He had observed the extraordinary value of dinner invitations in procuring friends, and consequently he inaugurated fortnightly dinners, which, on account of his *chef's* genius, were soon held to be the best in London. At these dinners, Ada did her best to second him in the task of entertaining, but it was evident to Ames that secretly she thought them tiresome. She wanted him to rise in the political world, but quickly and without all this diplomacy. She complained excessively of the custom of night sittings at the House. Why could they not do, as in France, so at Westminster, and get the whole thing over before seven?

One afternoon, when Ada had gone out shopping and Ames was engaged with Sims, Barnes called. He had come up from Southampton for a week, he said, and wanted to speak to Ames about the yachts. It had been arranged that the American officers and crew of the *Lohengrin* should be sent back to America, and that Barnes should take command in the ensuing season. The *Exe*, it was decided, should be sold. When Ames saw Barnes he said:

"You are the very man I wished to see. Call for me to-night at nine, and we will go to the House together."

Barnes came at the appointed time and Ames left with him at once.

"Barnes," he said, as they were walking down the street, "I want to introduce you to one of the most beautiful, most honest, and most charming women in the world; so before we go down to the House we'll take a hansom and drive to the lady's residence."

They entered a passing hansom and drove to Battersea. On the way Ames said:

"And, Barnes, if you do not become at once enchanted to the extent of wishing to marry her, if she is still free, you are not the man I take you for."

Barnes coughed:

"May I ask, Mr. Ames, if the lady is an intimate friend of yours?"

"I understand you, Barnes. You fear I may be wishing to get rid of an encumbrance. Be reassured, I have had no intimate relations with this paragon, and once I thought of marrying her myself."

They reached the block of flats, euphemistically called mansions, and ascended a cold stone staircase to the third floor.

Ames rang the bell, and an elderly maid appeared.

"Is Miss Claire Dubois in?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," the maid replied.

"Say that Mr. Ames is here."

A moment afterwards they were shown into a small parlour tastefully and comfortably furnished.

"See," said Ames, "there's a piano and an easel. The ladies who live here have plainly some artistic tendencies, although I fear but little leisure to indulge in them. There on the sofa is a piece of needlework in course of execution. It is clear they are industrious, and wherever there's industry, depend upon it, Barnes, there's worth. Look how charmingly those chrysanthemums are placed in those red vases on the mantel."

Barnes assented readily, but it was evident that he was still a little exercised in mind. Presently Claire entered, statuesque, superb, in a black cloth dress, and immediately Ames felt a sharp pang of regret. Possibly some of the women he had met had equal beauty, but none had this especial charm. It really would seem sacrilege if she were thrown away on Barnes, who, although an excellent and healthy man, did not appear sufficiently refined.

Ames made Claire a low bow:

"You see," he said, "I have returned, and I have taken the liberty of bringing with me a friend, who accompanied me on my journey, and whom I wish to introduce to you. Captain Barnes is a skilful navigator of our merchant navy, and a member of the Naval Reserve."

Claire said:

"It is kind of you to come and see me, and to bring Captain Barnes. What have you been doing since we met?"

Ames looked down at the floor and slowly answered:

"I have been getting married."

Claire started.

"Oh, then it *was* you, after all! I read of the wedding in the Paris paper, but I did not think that it was yours. They called you *Membre du Parlement.*"

Still looking at the floor, Ames said:

"I am."

For a few moments there was a silence. Claire seemed unable to find words, and Ames was at a loss for anything to say.

She said at length in a faltering tone:

"I must congratulate you, Mr. Ames. The news is a surprise to me. I did not know. You did not say. But now I understand."

There was a veiled reproach in these few words, and Ames knew that it was merited.

"I love at times," he said, "to be plain Mr. Ames. It enables me to ascertain how much or how little to esteem new friends."

She looked at him a moment almost timidly; then she rose.

"Excuse me a moment, I will call my friend."

Barnes had been a silent witness of this little scene, and as soon as the door was closed he glanced at Ames for an explanation.

"Well, well," said Ames, "I affirm what I said just now. My relations with this goddess were entirely platonic."

Claire returned with her friend, a schoolmistress of some thirty years, with whom Ames chatted for a little time, while Barnes conversed with Claire. Ames observed, however, that throughout the visit Claire's attitude was reserved and almost apprehensive. She had confessed to him, and possibly she did not trust him now. How wrong of her, how wrong! When he rose to leave, he complimented her upon her charming home. Was she still with the same firm? Yes? Some day, he prophesied, she would set up for herself and prosper. If there was anything he could do for her to advance her interests, he hoped she would not fail to write. She thanked him, smiling faintly, and then Barnes and he withdrew.

When they were in the hansom again, driving to the House, Ames asked Barnes his impression. Barnes said:

" She's lovely," and Ames sighed.

" Ah! Barnes, if you gain her, you're the most fortunate of men. A woman of that type has it in her power to bestow the greatest joy, the highest satisfaction that a man on earth can know."

Barnes was silent for a moment. Then he said:

" Excuse me, if I ask you, is she altogether straight? "

" Cautious navigator," Ames replied, " I declare to you that there is nothing crooked in her nature. There has been, it is true, a misfortune in her life, unmerited and cruel, and she would marry no man without confessing it. But one misfortune and one only. Literally the deception of one day, and the man who could not pardon it to such a creature would be a prejudiced, short-sighted individual."

“ She inspires confidence,” said Barnes, after thinking the matter out.

“ Of course she does; if you don’t return to Battersea on Sunday you’ll make a great mistake.”

Barnes simply said:

“ I shall.”

Then they spoke of the yachts and Ames gave instructions for the overhauling of the *Lohengrin*, saying that his wife was talking of a voyage to the Pacific later on, although he did not think that his engagements would permit him to proceed so far.

They reached the House, where Ames, who had previously given Barnes his ticket for the gallery, left him in the hall.

Ames was by no means in an even frame of mind. The sight of Claire had disturbed him greatly, and he almost reproached himself with having betrayed himself in acting as he had that evening. He had given away a prize which he might, by assiduity, have gained. There really must be a moral impulse in him after all. If he had no leanings towards a better standard of morality, he would never have conceived the vast contempt which he entertained for so many of the men and women who were to be met with in society. Very likely some might think that his morality was a mere calculation of self-interest, but these would be the people who were only able to discern the less recondite motives by which men were guided. He must banish this regret for Claire. He pulled himself together as he had done before and entered the deliberative chamber with a firm step, determined to seek in politics a change of thought. It was his policy in Parliament to select those questions for debate which concerned the welfare of the masses, and especially that class which might be considered philanthropic and non-partisan.

It happened that night that the question before the House, upon his entry, was the housing of the poor, a question which he had already studied. He therefore rose, when he found an opportunity, and delivered a speech which, although somewhat brief, was sound in logic and excellent in style. It contained more penetration than any which had preceded it and it was so well received that even the leader of the Government, who happened to be present, looked at Ames approvingly. As soon as the discussion ended, Ames left the House and walked to the office of his paper, where he dictated a trenchant criticism of unsanitary homes.

Then, after an interview with Edwards and an inspection of the machines, he walked home slowly, fairly contented with himself. He found Ada in the drawing-room, asleep in a low arm-chair before the fire, an unopened book upon her lap.

He stood beside her for some moments gazing at her full round face, expressive of nothing in particular, and he reflected on the hazards of human circumstances that had made her so phenomenally rich. One of the most striking marks of difference between men and animals was this power of the former to possess and when possessing to procure advantage.

She opened her eyes slowly and when she saw him standing by her side exclaimed:

"Oh, Lohy, I dreamed that you were at the House and speaking."

"That's where I was, Ada, and that's what I was doing."

"I should think they must be surprised down there to see a man like you to speak up."

"A man like me?"

"Why, yes, of course. A handsome man. Politicians are usually ugly."

Ames laughed. Women were always thinking of personal appearance and seldom of mental fitness. But no doubt that was how Nature worked through them.

"I forgot to tell you, Lohy, that I held a kind of court this afternoon. It's wonderful how people adulate one here, especially the men."

"Indeed," said Ames. "Pray tell me who was here."

"Well, there was the nephew of the Smeatons, Captain Fortescue and Dr. Frith. They all made love to me when they had a chance."

"Of course, you're joking, Ada."

"No, no, I'm not. They didn't fall down on their knees and make a declaration—no; but they went on complimenting mightily. I thought them comic, seeing that we've only just been three months married. It struck me all the same, that in this country, if a husband neglects his wife, she's got a remedy at hand."

To Ames this was a ray of light.

Already the money hunters were at work, trying to enter into Ada's favour in view of eventualities. In such a case, they thought, no doubt, that even the barest chance should be exploited. What a servitude this marriage was! She had warned him plainly that if he flagged in his attention there was a remedy at hand. One must always be on the watch for Captains Fortescue, and Doctors Frith, the poachers on their friends' preserves! Life truly was a constant struggle against the hostile enterprises of the neighbour!

He sat on the arm of her chair and took her hand.

"It's not my little Ada these maurauders should pursue, for she is not neglected, is she?"

The expression of Ada's face betrayed uncertainty. First she pouted and then she smiled.

"Yes and no, and no and yes."

"Surely, Ada," Ames protested, "you know I can't be always at your side."

"Not for the *whole* of the four-and-twenty hours—no."

Ames understood her meaning. This marriage state was indubitably tyrannous.

"Come, Ada, you must allow your husband to have some prudence and a little wisdom."

"Of course I will, dear Lohy. I'm not quite blind. I know you're working hard with that brain of yours all day, because you think I want you to become a minister. But soon, I hope, we'll spend the week-ends down in Kent, and then——"

"And then," said Ames, with an amused smile, "it will be different."

She placed his hand against her cheek and, looking at him, said:

"Lohy, you're my type, my everything, and when those bandits come again they'll just perceive that I'm a Boston girl."

Yes, Ames thought, it was impossible to doubt that she was still in love with him, and he did not think that he ran much risk from the speculative band who had been there that day. It was not a little touching that she should think he was striving there at Westminster solely to please *her*. In spite of her sharpness, there was a certain naïveness in her character which showed itself in such interviews as these.

However, he was in a mood that night to be conciliatory, and therefore he inquired of her what arrangements she had made for going down to Kingslake and what she had decided for the furnishing of her own boudoir, listening with apparent interest to all she said. They would have a happy time down there, he said, and really it would do her good to get away for a little time from the used-up air of London.

At length, as it was growing late, he assisted her to rise, and arm-in-arm they went upstairs together.

XIII

For the next three months, Ames lived a town and country life. From the Friday night to the Monday afternoon he stayed at Kingslake, where he amused himself by constructing a laboratory at the end of the park, in which it pleased his fancy to study the behaviour of the elements under all conditions that he could conceive. If he was going to lead a lengthy family life with Ada, he wanted some occupation of this kind, both as a change from politics and as a refuge from excessive conjugality. Ada, on her part, did her best to act the *châtelaine* and was at pains to make acquaintances amongst the neighbours. But she was continually upon wheels, dashing into the adjacent counties, running to the sea, seldom succeeding in inducing Ames to motor with her. Miss Vandek, however, came to stay with her from time to time, and Ames invited the Smeatons now and then. On the whole, the time passed pleasantly enough, Ames thought, in their ancestral hall, which Ada had had hung with Gobelin tapestry and ornamented with knights in armour, specially procured from antiquaries in Paris. Ames marvelled that a being so particularly modern should delight in these relics of a former age, but he said nothing on the subject, although he knew that the Smeatons, who possessed some coats of mail which had been worn by their own ancestors, must be amused when they beheld these acquisitions. One thing troubled

Ames, however. Ada insisted on hunting at least once a week, and though he did not care for it, he was obliged to accompany her or allow her to go alone.

In such matters she did not heed a word he said, and he knew quite well that it was useless to demur. She had been far too much accustomed to have her own way when a child. One day she was presented with the brush, and bore the trophy home in triumph. Ames took it from her in the hall, placed it in the headpiece of one of the knights in armour, as a plume, and hurried off to his chemistry, reflecting on the survival of the hunting instinct in the people of the present day.

Kingslake Castle, with its towers and its turrets, its fine baronial dining-hall, its terraces, and lawns, was all very well, Ames thought, for a day or two a week, but his proper sphere was London, where his interests were centred, and where he must always pass the major portion of his time so long as he wished to play an active part in life.

His journal was now fairly launched, and he was well contented with his staff, who followed his instructions carefully. Edwards had been successful in obtaining some outside contributors whose names bore weight, and it seemed that a time must come when, owing to an increase of advertisements, the paper would be self-supporting. He had been privately informed that its influence was felt in the world of politics in spite of the prudential limits of its political contents. This caused him satisfaction, because it proved that his direction had been wise. One afternoon, as he was writing in the room which was reserved for him at the office of the paper, Edith called, and he received her. She was looking well, in the full bloom of womanhood, and her straight and well-fleshed frame was good to see, Ames thought. He had not met her since he had left her with the party on the yacht, not having been at home when she had called on Ada.

She entered somewhat timidly, but, reassured by his cordiality, began:

"I came to ask you yet another favour. You know I am engaged to Dr. Hope, but doctors in these days have a struggle to exist. Now, my *fiancé* is clever with his pen, and I came, without consulting him, to know if you would let him write some medical reviews and articles."

Ames said at once that she might send Hope to the office when she liked or he would speak to him about the matter the next time he met him at the club.

"So you thought you'd marry," Ames said, with a smile. "An excellent idea, and one I have myself adopted."

"Yes, and how magnificently!"

Ames asked her if she had seen Constance. She answered that she had not, but had heard that she was still living in her large house in solitary state with two maidservants and no carriage. It was said that on her husband's death the estate had been partly liquidated to pay debts and that a pittance only had remained for her. Nevertheless, she was still supported by her biggest friends and was said to be extremely influential at the league.

"Oh," said Edith, with a sigh, "she was one of the many who were disappointed on that yacht."

"Indeed," said Ames, as though learning a new fact. "I'm sorry that any should have been disappointed. All were so charming, all!"

She smiled somewhat enigmatically, and, as he seemed busy, left. Constance had not appealed to him like Edith and had preferred to suffer poverty alone. He admired that, and she rose greatly in his estimation. He would have liked to go to her and to spend an afternoon with her, but that was no longer possible. He might not be received, and, even if he were, his visit might lead to complications, and besides, he was not free. This was a project which must be cast into his basket of impracticable aims.

Edith had said that Constance was now an influential member of the political organisation which was of all the most ultra-montane, and he could well imagine that her party bias had quadrupled since his marriage, because with women thwarted love increases all forms of bigotry. He had not inquired of Edith about Lucy, because he had been told that she had turned her back on England and had decided to reside in future in Berlin and in the south of France. Lucy was wise in her generation. There were reasons, doubtless, why she ought not to remain at home. What Sybil was doing he might have asked, although he did not think that Edith knew. Sybil had become mysterious of late, but no doubt she was pursuing the eternal game of sustenance and pleasure. Anyway, she had not come to worship at Ada's shrine, and that was one point in her favour. It was evident that the bevy of beauty which he had encountered at the outset was becoming dispersed or else estranged. He was sorry, but the world was wide and the opportunities of life were many. Nevertheless, all there was at present to satisfy his love for beauty was his wife, and certainly that was not overmuch. He supposed that later on he would develop an instinct of paternity, but of that he had not yet been conscious, and he could scarcely understand how Ada could ever be a mother unless she modified herself and gave up hunting foxes to the death, which it would not be easy, he foresaw, to make her do. Did he wish for offspring? Well, he did not think the world a very happy place of sojourn at its present stage for the majority of men and women, and if he had been poor, or even moderately meaned, he would certainly have had compunction for the introduction of new beings into it. But under the circumstances, it seemed to him, his progeny would have a remarkably pleasant time on earth, which would compensate for the inevitable penalty of death. It would have been easy for him to found a family outside the pale of matrimony with some woman set apart, whose physical attractions satisfied his aspirations. But he was fond of order in existence, and, in reality, of justice, and he did not think that he possessed the right to bring into the world those who could not bear his name, however well he might provide for them. Besides, the existence of secret loves always became known and diminished a man's prestige and power, because it gave the right to others to impair the fabric upon which his *status* rested. At the same time, he admitted that the strict observance of legality might limit the expansiveness and life-zest of a nature like his own. Why was there always this antithesis between the natural impulsion of men and the necessities of social life?

Towards the middle of April Ada at length decided to return to town. The season was advancing, and it was time that she attended to its demands. With Ames, she had drawn up a lengthy programme of the hospitality which was to be dispensed at Carlton Terrace. There were to be two balls and six receptions, besides the usual fortnightly dinners, which, however, were to be larger and more sumptuous than before. She was determined that before the session ended she would have the Premier at their table. In the summer holidays they would cruise to the Pacific and return *via* New York.

On the day preceding the departure from Kingslake, Ada had invited some of the neighbours to a farewell dinner, as well as Lady Smeaton, who had promised to come from Folkestone, where she had been staying. Ames, having some affairs to settle at the Castle, came down by an early train and Ada met him at the station. Ada was in the best of spirits and was looking almost pretty in her dress of white coachman's cloth which one of the four dogs that accompanied her had marked with his muddy paw.

Dismissing the car, they walked through the lanes of budding trees together to the house, enjoying the air of the fine spring morning.

Leaning on Ames' arm, Ada inquired the news of the last few days, and he told her what had been going on at Westminster and the successes which his journal had achieved. He was much amused when she asked him why his paper did not publish a portrait of himself instead of the ugly faces which appeared in it from day to day, and when he replied that newspaper proprietors were usually modest she burst into a laugh.

"I tell you, Lohy, modesty's no good."

Then she talked of her small affairs, of the orders she had given to restock the park with deer and of certain changes in the servants' livery. She would like to have a bear pit made and to obtain some nice white bears to fill it, but that could wait until the winter. She was so glad he had come home early, because she always liked to see as much of him as possible, and after lunch she intended going for a spin. It was a shame that he would never go with her!

At luncheon she maintained her buoyancy, drinking freely the sparkling Rhine wine, of which she was, Ames thought, too fond, and making jokes in Italian at the expense of the portly butler who had fallen in the wine cellar and had a strip of sticking plaster straight across his nose.

Ames listened indulgently to her chatter; but before he left her he told her to be careful on the motor drive and to return in time to make herself look well at dinner. She kissed him, promising that she would do her best to be as prudent as he wished.

For the next hour Ames was busy with the gardener, giving instructions for the replanting of the rosery and the introduction in the greenhouse of exotic plants. He was about to retire to his workshop when the noise of the motor sounded in the avenue. It was Ada leaving for her drive. She was steering the great refulgent car herself, with the chauffeur at her side. She waved her hand to him, and in another moment she had disappeared behind the pines in a turn of the winding path.

Strange creature, Ames reflected, but not without some pleasing ways. Perhaps, as she grew older, she would become more balanced, but at present certainly she was too much, as the French said, "in the air."

He passed some time engaged in working out an algebraic problem which had exercised his mind for some days past, and afterwards in performing some experiments which, however, he found to be somewhat difficult without assistants and additional appliances. Then he sauntered through the park, realising how impossible it was for any man to develop one-tenth part of the germs of knowledge given in the encyclopædic courses of the universities. No wealth could grant him time to take up more than one or two pursuits, and it was unwise to crowd life with too many interests.

Thinking thus, he reached the house, just as the declining sun, glowing with a rich red light, was illuminating the window panes and casting the shadows of the gables on the ground.

As he had an hour to spare before he dressed for dinner, he amused himself by placing on their shelves some of the books which he had sent to form a library, in the largest of the smaller rooms on the ground floor. As he was doing this, he came across "Il Principe" and stopped to read a passage here and there. Although written for another age, the work contained some principles which were easily applicable in this, as he had proved, he thought. The question was, however: Did the putting into practice of such principles conduct a man to happiness? The answer must depend, he judged, on what was meant by happiness. If happiness consisted in supremacy, position, free exercise of will, then he thought he was on the road to its attainment. But if it was the gratification, in its highest form, of the love desire, then he had not reached it. At the same time, he knew well that love was evanescent, while the advantages which he possessed would certainly endure. Some men there were to whom all these things accrued together, but the number of such men was small. Besides, while seeking for ideal loves a man might pass his life unloved, and that might have a bad effect upon him. As soon as he had arranged the volumes to his satisfaction, he left the study and ascended to his room. He had not heard the sound of Ada's motor while he had been with his books; but he concluded that she had returned and entered, as she often did, by the small door in the rear. By the time that he had finished dressing the tower clock struck the half-hour after six. He therefore crossed the landing to his wife's room to see if she was making progress with her toilet. He knocked at the door. There was no answer. He turned the handle and the room was empty. He descended to the hall and asked the first servant whom he met if Mrs. Ames had returned. The answer was a negative, and he went into the drawing-room, wondering how Ada could be so thoughtless as to stay out so late. Lady Smeaton had arrived and seemed somewhat surprised at Ada's absence, which Ames excused as best he could. She had stayed to tea, no doubt, at the Glendovers', and had not well timed the homeward drive. He spoke for some time with his guest, who told him the latest news of the set to which he, or more correctly Ada, now belonged, and he endeavoured to appear interested in the information he received, although he was unable to refrain from often glancing at the clock. It seemed incredible that Ada should forget her duties thus!

Presently the other guests arrived in quick succession: the parson, a thin ecclesiastic with a phenomenally long nose, a man whom Ames detested for his meddlesome proclivities, but whom Ada liked; the baronet who owned the next estate, and whom Ames thought an imbecile; a magistrate who delighted in harsh sentences; the chairman of a railway company, a good example of high feeding, and finally a general, who had just retired from the service and had come to live in the vicinity. All, except the parson, came with their wives, who on account of their proximity to town were not at all provincial in their dress.

There was at once a hum of conversation in the drawing-room. Ames said nothing to the last arrivals of Ada's absence, but he went out to the hall and despatched a servant to the village to endeavour to obtain tidings of the missing car. He stood himself a moment at the door, looking out into the half obscurity and wondering. Suddenly he remembered that the doctor who had been invited had not yet arrived. Perhaps, however, he had been called away.

He returned to the drawing-room, where the guests were still busy talking, and in answer to Lady Smeaton's question as to whether Ada had returned, he said:

"In a few moments, I feel confident, she will be here."

Nevertheless the hour of the dinner was already past, and there was as yet no sign of Ada. After a while the conversation flagged and the guests began to look at Ames inquiringly. Ames rose, and as he was moving to the door a servant entered with a grave face.

"Sir, will you please come?" he said, and Ames went out.

A man was carrying up the stairs a woman wrapped in a motor cloak with the hood drawn, followed by two maid-servants, who were weeping. At the foot of the staircase stood Dr. Richards, the invited guest. He seized Ames' hand and held it.

"Mrs. Ames," he said, "has met with a grave accident. As I was driving through the common, coming here, I was told that the car had overturned and had fallen down the bank. I hurried to the spot. Both your wife and the chauffeur were unconscious."

"My wife," said Ames, "is dead. I read it in your face." And he ascended to Ada's room, followed by the silent doctor.

There, on the great oak bed, they had placed Ada. Her eyes were closed. There was a scar upon her face. Her light dress was besmeared with blood. It was all over. She had driven for the last time!

Ames seized her hand. It was already cold. Poor little wayward child, he thought, a victim of the folly of her age! Although his eyes were dry, he was conscious of a pang. He had lost a good companion, and one who was attached to him.

"How long," he asked the doctor, "did she survive?"

"Death," answered Richards, "must have been instantaneous from concussion. If you will excuse me I will go to the chauffeur, who is in need of all that I can do. I shall make the necessary arrangements."

Saying this, he left, and Ames remained for a few moments gazing at the pale and lifeless form. A very short lease of life, he thought; very short indeed!

He left the room, and on the landing he found Lady Smeaton and the parson. In answer to their condolences he said:

"The motor has made another victim!" And on the parson asking if he might enter the mortuary chamber, he answered:

"Yes, please go and pray."

Then he went to his own room, wrote telegrams to Ada's relatives and friends, and after giving a few directions to the housekeeper, and observing for a moment the departure of the guests, he unlocked a cabinet in which he kept the great elixir he had given Mair upon his wedding day. He had not needed it on that occasion, but now, somewhat unnerved, as he acknowledged himself to be, he judged it to be necessary. Drawing out the flask, he filled a glass with the liqueur, which he drank leisurely. Then, after walking up and down the room for a short time, he undressed and went to bed.

The next morning when he awoke, the sun was streaming through the windows and the birds were singing loudly in the trees. As he opened his eyes and saw the glad spring aspect of the morning he could scarcely realise that Ada had taken leave of life and that a new era in his existence was about to dawn. He had slept so peacefully all night that it seemed at first that the events of the day before must be a dream. However, he quickly shook off the illusion, sprang out of bed, and began to use his clubs. By physical means, most trouble could be overcome.

During the next four days he passed through a period of unrest and of gloom. There were formalities to be gone through, demeanour to be maintained, and Ada's aunt to be received, and the letters and telegrams that showered in disturbed him, so that he had Sims down to answer those that needed a reply.

Mrs. Adams was inconsolable. Her little Ada, whom she had nursed when she was a babe!

"But why did you let her go for those motor drives?" she asked.

And Ames replied:

"Because she had a passion for locomotion which nothing but imprisonment could check."

"Did you warn her of the danger of high speed?" the aunt inquired.

"Often; and not later than yesterday I asked her to be careful."

Mrs. Adams said no more, but it was evident that she was scarcely satisfied and she maintained towards him an attitude of slightly marked reserve which vexed him. If she had any *arrière pensée* he wished she would speak out, and unless she did he would not be sorry when she left.

After the funeral was over, after Ada, embalmed, had been laid to rest in a temporary receptacle in the village churchyard, pending the erection of a sumptuous mausoleum, and when those invited to the ceremony had departed, Ames sat down to dinner, accompanied by Mair, whom he had asked to stay with him until to-morrow.

"Mair," he said, "six months ago you saw me wedded, and to-day you see me once again a celibate. The wheel of destiny turns swiftly, does it not, at times?"

"In your case, certainly; but then you are so totally exceptional. I often think you are a kind of superman."

"I lay no claim to supermanliness. Circumstances make me what I am."

Mair shook his head.

"You shape them."

Ames frowned.

"Not all."

Mair saw that he had committed an indiscretion, and hastened to add in a grave tone:

"Of course, I know, not all."

"I am sorry she has gone," said Ames. "She was a lively little lady and I should have passed my life with her. But now—with whom am I to pass my life?"

"I should suppose," said Mair, "that when the time comes there will only be an embarrassment of choice."

"Yes, yes; you think like all the rest that because a man is rich he can obtain the moon. Relinquish that idea. A poor man sometimes gets what a Crœsus sighs for vainly."

"That's true," said Mair, "although few people will believe it now. I remember once in Paris there was a girl art student who was so beautiful and charming that all the youngsters were in love with her. A wealthy young financier offered to marry her, but she refused him for an artist poorer than herself."

"Of course, Mair, such things happen. I believe I know a young girl now quite capable of refusing a millionaire."

"Such a woman would be worth an infinitude to win."

"That is as I see it, Mair. I'm glad that you agree with me."

When the dinner was over, Ames proposed that they should go and ascertain how the chauffeur was, and accordingly they went round to the stables, at the side of which was the garage and the house where the injured servant lived. As they reached it, the doctor was just leaving.

"The poor fellow has just died," he said. "His sufferings were dreadful."

"His wife," said Ames, "shall be provided for, as well as his two boys."

They walked back to the house together, and Richards spoke of Ada.

"So good-tempered, such a happy nature! We shall never have her equal. Two beds she endowed at our cottage hospital!"

"And I," said Ames, "endow to her memory two more."

Richards thanked him warmly.

"What a blessing there are people in the world like you!"

"There is a growing party," Ames remarked, "which holds that we are parasites."

But the doctor was no socialist.

"That's what they are themselves."

They entered the house, and Richards rested a few moments in the library.

"I should think," Ames said, "that you must realise at times what a waste of life is constantly produced, seeing that you are present at the ending up of so many men and women. Do you not sometimes feel that it is all a vain expenditure which might just as well not be incurred?"

But Richards shook his head.

"No, in all this birth and death I see a purpose."

"Indeed?" said Ames. "Would you kindly tell me what it is?"

"It cannot be expressed in words, but, depend upon it, we are moving to a goal."

"Can you, by using millions of years as days, assign a date for its attainment?"

"No, I cannot."

"Then you must allow me to be sceptical!"

Richards heaved a sigh.

"Surely you are not a pessimist!"

"I am no *ist* of any kind. I merely seek for information."

Mair said:

"Schopenhauer thought that we and our earth are disturbing uselessly the happy rest of nothingness, and sometimes he seems to me to be not altogether wrong; only I can't perceive much happiness in the rest of the frigid ether."

"Yes," said Ames. "That was a mere *jeu d'esprit* on the part of the philosopher of Frankfort. The fact is, we must either be content to consider ourselves as far more important in the scheme of things than we probably are, or fall into indifference concerning life, its motives, and its aims. If we adopt the latter course, we shall soon feel inclined to quit. At any rate, if there is ever to be found a key to the enigma, it won't be in our time."

The doctor closed the argument.

"Well, well, since we can't help being born, we may as well take comfort by supposing that we live for a good end!"

The next morning Ames returned to town. In the afternoon he was busy at his office, and so occupied that he forgot his personal affairs. But when he returned to his house for dinner and he found himself at the table he could not help feeling lonely. There, at his side, was the place which she had lately filled. On the mantel was a card-case she had used. He must be growing sentimental to be noticing such things, he thought, and when the meal was over he surprised himself, roaming about the house as though in search for something that he missed. He reached the bedroom that had been his wife's. Here there were further traces of her presence, and he fancied that her form was slightly marked in the great white bed.

He withdrew and went down to the library, where he tried to read, but could not. He threw down the book and engaged in a discussion with himself. Had he, or had he not, sufficiently dissuaded her from those motor risks? Ought he, or ought he not, to have imprisoned her rather than let her take them?

Perhaps he ought; but if he had, what would have happened? She would have complained of cruelty and returned to her old proclivities as soon as she was free. Nevertheless, he felt that he was arguing thus in order to convince himself that he had acted well; but at the bottom of his mind there lurked a scruple. There could be little doubt that he should have used more zeal in urging her to give up the pursuit which had caused her death. Well, if he had loved her more, no doubt he would have been more zealous, but he had married, in the main, for increased wealth, and of course in doing so he had done what was not reconcilable with very strict morality. But was there anyone who would have acted better in the present age? At all events, he was sorry she had gone, because he thought he would have grown attached to her more closely as the years went by, since there was scarcely a stronger force than that of habit. And again, if she had married some spendthrift, as she might easily have done, her enormous wealth might have been dissipated idly, whereas now it would be well applied. It was fortunate that from the first he had declined to drive with her, or he might have been annihilated, too, and the money might have reverted to some distant transatlantics, who would probably have used it to less purpose.

Suddenly he remembered her unfinished portrait in the upper studio. Should he finish it from memory? He did not think so, because women would be women, and her successor, when she came, would no doubt seek to banish it from sight. And that would cause him pain and excite his stern displeasure. No, Ada must live in his memory alone; but there she would always occupy a premier position, and really, after all, her immolation on the altar of velocity was not his fault. Consoled with this reflection, he called for his hat and coat, and walked up to the club.

Craig was the only member in the smoking-room. Seated before a window, the blind of which had not been drawn, he was looking out into the street, philosophising, no doubt, Ames thought, upon the movement in it. When he saw Ames, he said:

"Well, legislator, director of the public mind, Dives, and I know not what besides, how is it with you? I have not seen you for some time, but I have watched your progress. First, member of uncertain hue, pleading the cause of the lowly, then originator of an esoteric journal, are you not the kind of man the rulers must eventually recompense to bring you into line? What is it that you ask of them? Say and it shall be given, whether merited or not."

Ames took a seat beside the club philosopher.

"Mr. Craig, I gather from what you say that you are quite convinced I am about to follow the ancient path of the self-seeker, of the man whose self-love craves the reverence of all, and who takes any means to gain it. You have seen me seizing the opportunities that offered themselves to me, but until you know how I intend to use them I do not think you would be wise to draw conclusions."

Craig turned in his chair and stared at Ames.

"Might it be possible that you are an exception to the rule? But, no, no, no! if you were, they'd find the way to rid themselves of you, and then you'd have to go into the camp of the hungry men, a place where Dives cannot live."

"Now supposing," Ames said, with a smile, "that I were much less complex than you think, that I were simply seeking justice on its own account, what would you say to that?"

"I should say that you were a phenomenon that had not been hitherto produced."

Ames said:

"Wait and see."

XIV

Ames passed the summer quietly in strict attention to his work, which grew from day to day. He was becoming known. The story of his colossal wealth had got abroad, and he was regarded as a man of almost transcendental monetary force, who was to be ranked high up among the fortuned few.

The Smeatons, who had a niece just "coming out," endeavoured to attract him to their house, but unsuccessfully. He wished to devote himself, for a time, entirely to business. When all had been ordained according to his ideas, then it would be time to come into the world again. And also he wanted a little time to reflect on certain principles which might require to be modified.

One of his principal relaxations consisted in visiting art galleries, and having received an invitation to an exhibition of a Polish artist who was quickly rising into fame, he walked to Bond Street to inspect it. He was pleased with the painter's talent, especially in the delineation of scenes of Polish history, and was walking through the rooms, in the contented frame of mind into which he was usually thrown by the sight of creditable art, when he suddenly found himself face to face with Sybil. He almost started when he saw her. What a change had taken place in her! Instead of the firm and classic countenance which he had once so much admired, he saw a face that was drawn and marked, with eyes that had lost their lustre.

She smiled almost scornfully as he raised his hat, but stopped.

"So we meet again," she said; "I suppose you think I should have come to call some time ago, but the fact is, after the yacht experience, I felt a little shy. I compliment you on the way you managed that; you're skilful, very. People talk about your skill."

"The yacht affair," he said, "is ancient history. If people talk about my skill, I must feel flattered, so long as they talk in a good sense. If otherwise, I shall know how to defend myself."

"Will you call in the police?"

Ames made an impatient movement.

"Let's cease this trifling. Tell me how you are and how it is with you. Did I not hear some talk of an engagement?"

"I have been very ill, as you can see by my face, of course. My sister's dead, and there's no engagement."

"Bad news," said Ames. "I wish I knew what I could do for you."

She looked into his face a moment.

"Peugh! You simply talk to talk."

This seemed to him a fitting opportunity to end the interview. She really was too rude. Without replying, therefore, he raised his hat, and was passing on, when she called him back.

"Excuse me," she said, "I didn't mean to be so harsh, but really I have had too much of late to suffer from your sex."

"Yes, you are passing through a crisis. You are paying the penalty of having infringed the laws of established order. Oh, do not think I blame you! Youth sometimes makes demands which cannot be refused. Unfortunately, there comes a time of reckoning when the existence of convention is keenly realised. But do not let convention trouble you. It is only made by those who break its rules in secret. You seem to me to have conceived a grudge against the world. Do not increase that feeling, or it will bring retaliation on you. Rather change it into a courageous independence that will carry you along through life."

She said:

"You give me good advice, but what do you know of me?"

"More than you suspect, but I am the most discreet of men."

She reflected for a moment, troubled.

"Why are you in mourning?" she asked at length.

"Have you not heard that I have lost my wife?"

She shook her head. No, she had not heard. Lately she had kept aloof from every one and had scarcely read the papers. At once, however, he appeared to possess more interest for her.

"Bad news, as you said just now. We are both alone, apparently, in life. Will you not come and dine with me to-night at my club, 'The Origo'?"

At once Ames saw the trap. No, no. Sybil had lost her beauty. She would never regain it now, and he was not disposed to make the effort needful to defend himself against her. Women in her state were generally desperate and ready to attach themselves like limpets to a man of means. He excused himself on the plea of business at the House, and at once her countenance, on which a gleam of hope had passed, resumed its tired and dejected air.

"Good-bye," she said; "you know where I am to be found."

He pressed her hand, assuring her that he would always be glad to hear of her welfare, always ready to counsel her in any difficulty. Then he left the gallery, congratulating himself greatly on having avoided so dangerous a shoal. Because, although Sybil was by nature of the good class, he knew quite well how easily adversity and disappointment might force her to the bad category.

In Bond Street he met Penton, who appeared to have grown younger. He was coming to call on Ames, he said, to ask him if he would become a director in a great financial company of which he was the chairman, and which was formed to deal in American securities. As Ames was so skilful an administrator, he would like to have him on the Board. He would send him the particulars. The dividend was expected to be nothing less than twenty-five per cent.

"My dear Penton," Ames said in his softest tone, "I value my liberty too much."

"You mean, of course, your time."

"No, no, my liberty, my freedom from incarceration; and I sincerely trust, if you embark upon this enterprise, you won't lose yours. Turn your back upon the city, Penton, while there is yet time. Tell me, how is the Gräfin?"

Penton was inclined to be offended, but he conquered his ruffled feelings, and replied:

"Oh! just as you like, of course. I don't go into things without being sure they're sound. My daughter is in Berlin and at the Court. She is about to make a tour around the world."

After this he said good-bye with an air of offended dignity. Ames thought: "If he gets among the city wolves, they'll certainly devour him, unless he be a wolf himself!"

When he reached his house, Sims handed him a letter which had just arrived. It was from Smeaton, who had put Ames up for a social club to which he himself belonged, and it informed him that he had been blackballed. It was incomprehensible, Smeaton said, because his candidates had always hitherto got in. Ames must have some secret enemy, or such a thing could never have occurred. Annoyed, Ames tore the letter into little pieces. Smeaton was quite right, there was an enmity at work against him, and this was a fresh manifestation of its strength. And, for the rest, it was Smeaton's fault that this had happened, since it was at his instance he became a candidate. It was tiresome that these Smeatons could not leave him to his own devices.

He had observed, also, that a portion of the Opposition Press spoke of him, when it did not ignore him altogether, in a way that was quite unusual, and this was the more strange as he knew the deep respect in which men of wealth were generally held. There was an etiquette to be observed among Press people, and if it was laid aside whenever he was in question, then something must be wrong. In a satirical weekly he was travestied as Signor Amores, the Dark Party. Even when he made a large donation to the funds of a new hospital, the fact was chronicled by the adverse journals in the smaller type. He put the matter eventually into the hands of Sims, who was a patient and keen investigator, possessing his entire confidence. One day, also, he received a letter of blackmail. If he did not pay five thousand pounds, the orgies of his secret room should be revealed. This he put in the wastepaper basket. It seemed clear to him that a legend was in process of formation, and he realised that the vocation of millionaire was not without its cares. There was nothing illicit in his life, and it was really a sign of very bad times indeed, if he was to be accused of crimes which he never had committed. His "secret room" was a freak of his earlier fancy, but he could quite well see how it might be used against him. When he was not at work, he certainly felt dull. He had scarcely added to his list of friends, not because there were no candidates for his friendship, but because his early experience of life had made him wary. Of course there were hosts of facile pleasures in his reach, and it was possible that his bodily health might benefit by a limited indulgence in them; but he was convinced that they would leave a lassitude of thought behind them which would spoil the mental state in which he liked to dwell. Soon, he supposed, he would have to think of finding a companion of the other sex. When he remembered, however, the smoking, drinking, gambling women which the age produced, he shrank from a project of that kind. Were there no other women to be met? Of course there were, if only one sought well. Had he not met the true type once? Yes, but a year, or thereabouts, had passed since then, and perhaps she was no longer free.

It was a Sunday afternoon as he reflected thus, and suddenly he rang the bell.

"Giacomo, quick! my hat and gloves."

In another moment he was in a hansom and on his way to Bayswater. At Gloucester Gate he alighted at the Hursts' door, and as he rang he could not help feeling guilty. He had given the Hursts no intimation of his marriage and had acted for many months as though oblivious that they lived. Therefore, it was not without some qualms of conscience that he told the maid his name and followed her upstairs.

In the drawing-room Mrs. Hurst and her daughter were talking to a visitor whose back was turned. The visitor rose as he entered, and to his surprise he witnessed Moore.

There was a moment of embarrassment, both on the part of the Hursts and Moore. At length the former greeted him with a subdued politeness with a shade of coolness. Moore, however, merely bowed, without offering his hand. Ames noticed that the Hursts were dressed in mourning.

Moore continued his conversation with Elaine. Ames, therefore, spoke to Mrs. Hurst. As well as he could, he explained to her that his marriage had taken place abroad and that his wife had not yet made the acquaintance of all his friends when she met with her fatal accident. He felt that the excuse was lame, but he was somewhat disconcerted by the formality of the reception which he was receiving (Elaine having scarcely glanced in his direction), and he was unable to construct a better one in strict conformity with truth. And while he was asking Mrs. Hurst how she had passed the London winter, and learning from her that they had been to the Riviera after the death of her aged father, he heard Elaine tell Moore that they would spend the summer at some place in France. The young girl, more interesting than ever with her air of candour, was telling Moore of her experiences at a bazaar at which he had been present, and it was evident from what she said that they were in the habit of meeting often and were on the whole on more intimate terms than previously. It looked very much as if Moore was paying court, although it was hard to believe that he should do so, considering the modest means which the Hursts were known to have. He sustained the conversation with the mother while thinking the matter out. Why, after all, should they be so reserved with him? They were much too high-minded and urbane to take serious offence at his neglect of them, and if they were thus shy it must be that they, too, had been influenced against him. Suddenly an idea struck him. Ha, the influence wasn't far to seek! The influence was Moore's. Moore had a grudge against him on account of Ada, and had no doubt been damaging him here, and perhaps elsewhere. It was curious conduct for a debtor, but it was part, perhaps, of the new behaviour. Well, now that he felt sure of this, he would know how to shape his course. He strove to interest the mother by speaking of London charities, and he asked her advice as to the most deserving. To what hospitals should he be a donor or to what institutions? The plan succeeded, for Mrs. Hurst at once and gladly began to give him counsel, speaking enthusiastically of a home for girls in Shoreditch of which she was a patroness, and of a children's hospital in Kennington which she had helped to found. Both were in need of funds, she said, and Ames immediately invited her to name the amount that he should give. She hesitated, scarcely daring, so she owned, to say how much was requisite to place both the establishments in a satisfactory position. Ames pressed her, and she confessed at length that the hospital needed three thousand pounds and the home about fifteen hundred.

"You will greatly oblige me," said Ames, smiling, "by putting my name down for these sums."

She thanked him warmly. He was the greatest benefactor they had had! Ah, what a joy she would experience when she told the committees of his gift! She was so overcome with gratitude that Elaine, perceiving her emotion, interrupted her conversation with Moore and turned towards her.

"Mr. Ames," the mother said, "has promised all we want at Shoreditch and at Kennington!"

Thoughtful for a moment, Elaine said quietly:

"Thank you, Mr. Ames; thank you very much indeed."

Moore, however, gave Ames a rapid glance of irritation.

Pursuing the advantage he had gained, Ames, addressing Elaine, declared that it gave him the greatest satisfaction to be able to assist a little in that way, and almost in the same breath proceeded to inquire how she had liked her stay on the Riviera and whether the wind had been as cold as usual down there, continuing on other topics and endeavouring to bring her beneath the influence which he knew he exercised on women. Then, when he judged that he had produced a good effect, he rose.

To his delight, Mrs. Hurst expressed a hope that he would come again to see them soon. Elaine gave her hand with some timidity, but her attitude was far more cordial than it had been on his entrance.

When he found himself in the street again, he walked slowly down towards the park, thinking of his visit, but he had not gone far before he was overtaken. Moore, almost out of breath, was at his side.

"I should like a few words with you," Moore said, in a tone which he seemed to struggle to keep calm.

"Very good," Ames answered, stopping and facing him.

"You have called on the Hursts again," continued Moore, "and no doubt you mean to pay more visits. Now, I should like to warn you that if you come with any intentions regarding Miss Hurst, you will have me as your rival. I should think it would be sufficient that I should tell you this for you to relinquish any project you may have formed in this direction. You have already balked me once, and I presume you will not attempt the feat a second time. If I am mistaken, and you intend to thwart me, then I promise you that you will have no easy task. As for my small indebtedness to you, the sum will be repaid not later than to-morrow morning."

"It is unfortunate," Ames said, unmoved, "that we should both take a fancy to the same ladies, the more so as I have no intention of giving the assurance you demand."

Moore started.

"Very well; I know now how to act. You think, no doubt, your wealth can always win, but wealth is sometimes powerless against a damaged reputation."

"If my reputation's damaged," Ames said quickly, "there must have been a damager. I'm seeking him and hope to find him soon. I think that you, perhaps, might give me his address."

Moore abruptly broke away and quickly disappeared down the adjacent street. Poor Moore, Ames thought, how desperate his case must be! Would it be right to come between him and Elaine? Right! Of course it would, for she deserved a better husband and one that would do more good in the world than this idler ever could. Of what use was a man like that in the social hive? Why, none! He should seek some gilded widow for a wife. He certainly did not deserve Elaine. It was ridiculous that he should ask him to desist. Surely the young girl might be left to make her choice.

He walked across the park in the cool July evening. Then he dined at his club, where he spent the evening in a quiet corner making plans.

The next morning after he had sent a cheque to Mrs. Hurst and was reading the papers, Barnes called to see him to ascertain what arrangements were to be made in respect of the voyage to the Pacific, about which Ames had written him some weeks before.

Barnes walked into the library with a light step, and Ames said after a moment's scrutiny:

"You've good news to announce. I see it in your face."

"Yes. I'm to be married in a week to Claire."

"I knew it. Tell me how it came about."

Then Barnes told of his betrothal. Having carefully observed Claire for some time and grown more and more attached to her as he perceived how well she bore out Ames' testimony, he had at length decided to propose, and had been accepted.

She would not abandon her employment, for a time at least, and later on she spoke of establishing herself in Bond Street as a Court modiste.

"That is," said Barnes, with a quiet smile, "if she isn't too much occupied with other duties."

Ames frowned at this.

"Let her follow out her plan. She will make you rich and yet preserve her charm. Never forget that over-population is an evil."

Barnes laughed, and they talked about the voyage. Was it to be to the Pacific? If so, he would have to see to charts and stores, as well as to obtaining a picked crew.

Ames said:

"The day before yesterday it was to be to the Pacific, but now I do not know. In the Channel or around the world."

Barnes hesitated.

"Around the world!"

"Yes, and there will be no women on the ship this time, and, Barnes, I want the name changed to the *Exe*."

The master sighed.

"Very well, Mr. Ames. I shall prepare for all eventualities. I should like a fortnight for the honeymoon, but of course I shall hold myself at your disposal. I owe much to you for having found me such a wife."

Ames said:

"Hasten the wedding if you can and take your fifteen days."

Barnes thanked him. A little later, as he was leaving, he lingered for a moment at the door, as if embarrassed. At length he said:

"I should like to tell you, Mr. Ames, that Claire and I would be greatly honoured if you would come to our wedding."

But Ames replied at once with a gesture of refusal.

"No, Barnes, that I cannot do. It would upset me to behold so great a prize forever lost. Besides I have a matrimonial project of my own on hand, and that takes up my time."

As Barnes appeared surprised, he added:

"Oh! there's nothing definite as yet. It's all in a distant future. Good-bye. I'll send you a present soon."

Barnes thanked him and withdrew.

The captain had scarcely left when Giacomo entered with a letter. Ames opened the envelope and found that it contained a cheque from Moore for four hundred and fifty pounds in payment of the debt. He at once endorsed and crossed it, after which he sent it to Barnes together with a slip of paper, on which he wrote:

"A wedding present from the owner of the *Exe*."

Poof! there was an end of that matter and of a youthful love.

The next day Ames received a letter of graceful thanks from Mrs. Hurst, but to his surprise no invitation to dinner or to lunch, and no renewed expression of her hope that he would call to see them soon. Moore, no doubt, had been at work already, and perhaps the fate of Elaine was decided. Ah, well, it would be a pity if that were so; for he would never meet another girl of equal worth. He fell to wondering how soon he might reasonably call again, and passed an unhappy afternoon, going at length to the House for dinner in a discontented frame of mind. Fortunately his inventive faculty was good and it was not long before he had discovered a pretext to call before the week was at an end.

In the meantime he was busy putting things in order before the season ended, and attended meetings of his political committee, to whom he hinted that he might need a lengthy holiday at no very distant date. He had decided to go to Bayswater on the Friday, and on the Thursday afternoon, after Edwards had lunched with him, and he was at work with Sims, Giacomo entered with the air of mystery that Ames knew well. Discreet as ever, he had written on a piece of paper:

"A lady, who gives the name of Ventner, desires to see the signor on important business. I have shown her to the drawing-room."

"Good," said Ames, "in half an hour." And he continued his correspondence, apparently unconcerned, although he was a little exercised in mind, unable to divine what pretext had brought Constance there thus openly.

At length, when he had given his instructions for the last letter, he rose and went upstairs.

Constance was still waiting. She was little changed, although her face was thinner. Ames greeted her without much warmth, and silently. She said after a moment's hesitation:

"You have not forgotten that a year ago I allowed you to paint my portrait. Would you be kind enough to tell me what has become of the picture, which was almost finished then? If it has been destroyed, so much the better. If not, I want an assurance that it will be, as I do not wish it to be seen in your possession."

Ames thought the pretext weak. It was evident she had not come for that, and he must be very cautious. He replied:

"The portrait is still down there in the studio. It's entirely at your disposal."

"Thank you," she said, making a movement towards the door. "I shall send for it to-day."

Ames made no attempt to induce her to remain longer; she lingered, however, of her own accord.

"Is it possible," she asked, "that after the friendship there existed once between us, you should receive me in this way?"

"You see," he said, "that after your severity at Venice, and the want of confidence which you have just shown, I am embarrassed."

"Would any woman in my place," she asked, "have acted otherwise?"

Thinking that he had now to sustain a feminine attack, he invited her to take a seat.

"I no more know how another woman would have acted in your place than another man in mine; but I am sure that all that happened, being planned by fate, was unavoidable. I am, as you perceive, a strong determinist."

With a sigh, she said:

"You have not changed!" She added: "If I were in your place, I should try, at least, to react against the social fate which seems to be awaiting you."

Interested at once, Ames said:

"The social fate? Perhaps you can inform me who its authors are."

"You need not look at me like that, for I'm not one of them. No, I have opposed you politically, as I always did, and shall, but it is not I who have put into circulation the reports."

"The reports? What are they?"

"They're varied, and I would rather be excused from mentioning them. At any rate, they are sufficient to make your progress in society extremely difficult, if not impossible."

"Do you believe them?"

"No."

"Do you know who spread them first?"

"I do."

"Can you deny it's Moore?"

"I can't."

Ames rose and walked to the end of the room. Then he returned and resumed his seat.

"You see," said Constance, "he's not so harmless as he looks. For many years he's been suffering the sting of poverty, and it has made him inwardly enraged. When you defeated his hopes at Venice and carried away the prize, he seems to have vowed vengeance, and you know how easy it is for a man like him to damage by insinuation, without ever making a specific charge, leaving it to the scandal lovers to complete the mischief which they've done. And now your only chances are the agency of time (say, twenty years), or of someone of position who will take up your cause."

Ames saw that she was offering the protection of her influence and rank, and he knew that the offer was not without value. He knew also that if he accepted it she would require a reward which he was not disposed to pay, and suddenly his old rancour against the class that had despised him formerly revived.

"This," he said, "is your society?"

But she prevented him from saying more.

"Oh! don't sneer at society, for if you do, not even your wealth will save you from a fall, and woe to the man who's ostracised."

"I'm sorry I can't agree with you," he said. "The more I see of your society, the more I am convinced that wealth, or money, if you like it better, can break down all its barriers, all its rules. It was because I learnt that lesson well in early life that I grew mercenary. A rich man triumphs over your society; a poor man has to grovel to it, or suffer its derision and contempt. Do you think that I am troubled by these fictions? I shall know how to defend myself alone."

"I like your courage," she said thoughtfully. "I always liked you for your qualities, and, in spite of your treatment of me, I sincerely trust you won't be made a victim. I, too, have lately felt the bitterness of straitened means, and although I have been well supported by my friends, I have realised how inevitably one gets left behind when poor. Ah! I have passed through many trials since we parted on the station over there at Venice; but the cruelest of all was your abandonment."

"Really," said Ames, "I must protest. That is not the term to use. Abandonment suggests association, and you know well that there was nothing of the sort between us."

"How you quarrel about words! And how ungracious you are still towards me! I have had to repress my pride to speak as I have spoken, and I meet with nothing but unkindness."

She looked discouraged, and for a moment he felt sorry for her.

"Well, well," he said at length, "let us not quarrel about anything. It was good of you to warn me of the danger to which you thought I was exposed, and after the holidays, if you will allow me, I will come and see you."

Her face brightened. "After the holidays! Why not before, when you know that you will be so welcome."

"You see," continued Ames, already regretting his imprudence, "I'm very busy. Politics and journalism claim me. At the season's end there's much to attend to, I assure you."

"Where are you going in the yacht this year?"

"To Honolulu or to France, if not around the world."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

"What do you think of me for staying here so long?"

"I take it as a special mark of your esteem."

"And I consider it a sign of my infatuation."

He reflected for a moment. It must be as she said and she was as a moth that hovered round the combination of his wealth and person. If she was reasonable, he might be able to advance her interests, but if she had the fixed idea of marriage with him, then he could do nothing for her. As he did not answer her last remark, she seemed to take his silence as a condemnation, and she rose.

"I shall stay no longer. If you have the least good feeling you will come to see me soon. Good-bye."

Really, he thought, when she was gone, it was a pity to see so nice a woman reduced to such sad straits. Why hadn't she found a man to wed her? Doubtless she soon would, and with this reflection he returned to work.

On the Friday afternoon, the day, he remembered, when the Hursts were usually at home, he drove to Bayswater. As he rang the bell he had a slight misgiving, which the elderly maid who opened the door confirmed. Mrs. and Miss Hurst, she said, had left for Dieppe the day before.

Greatly disappointed, Ames drove home at once.

"Giacomo, pack my things. We leave for Dieppe to-night."

At daybreak the next morning Ames and his man stood on the deck of the steamer watching her entrance into harbour. The town, still plunged in half obscurity, looked calm and peaceful, and more like a maritime port than the fashionable resort which it becomes in the summer months. The sky was clear and the air was fresh, and Ames felt invigorated and expectant. Why had he come here? Why had he thus pursued Elaine when he need not have sought a wife again so soon? When, in spite of all that Constance said about the slanderers, he knew that, as Mair had once remarked, he had but the embarrassment of choice? Why? Because Elaine possessed the qualities which alone could make the marriage state acceptable, according to his view, and because Elaines were rare. After landing, he drove to the hotel on the sea front, which he had heard recommended as the best, and there took rooms. In London he had not liked to ask the servants where the Hursts were staying, knowing well that in a place like Dieppe the visitors were to be met each day on the promenades.

After resting a few hours he quitted the hotel and took a stroll upon the front. It was the bathing hour, and there was the usual scene of Gallic seaside life, a little marred by the shingly nature of the beach. Ames remained upon the walk above, watching for a moment, not without some interest, the clever swimming of two boys who were playing ball upon the water. Suddenly, as he resumed his stroll, he perceived two ladies and a gentleman coming in his direction, whom he quickly recognised as the Hursts and Moore. He was not surprised, for he had anticipated this move on the part of Moore. Well, that made the enterprise more strenuous! As soon as the Hursts perceived him, their faces expressed extreme surprise, while Moore's became congested. Raising his hat with great composure, Ames exclaimed:

"How pleased I am to meet you here!" and then, turning to Moore, he said in a tone of unconcern: "Good-morning, Moore."

Mrs. Hurst spoke to him in a tone that, although cordial, was almost grave, and Elaine appeared perplexed. They talked of Dieppe and its attractions, and Mrs. Hurst explained that they had decided, somewhat hurriedly, to come there, as the weather had become so hot in town, and her daughter had been suffering. Elaine, however, declared that she had only been a little tired and was already quite restored.

During this conversation Moore had maintained a rigid silence, and Ames fully realised how strained the situation must become. Determined, however, to face it boldly he asked Elaine if they were going townwards, and as she replied that they were just returning to their hotel, he said:

"And so am I to mine. If you will allow me, I will accompany you." And as the Hursts could not refuse this offer, they started off together. Ames was careful to preserve the place he had secured at Elaine's side and to keep up a continued conversation, while Moore was forced to place himself upon the other flank at the other side of Mrs. Hurst. The walk, however, was a short one. When they reached the door of Ames' hotel the ladies stopped and were taking leave, when Ames said:

"Oh! but I live here, too."

Elaine started slightly as she heard this, and

Moore gave Ames a glance of almost open enmity. Then the Hursts said *au revoir* to Moore and entered, followed at once by Ames, who thought that fortune was upon his side that morning.

It was the hour of the midday breakfast, and as they were somewhat late the ladies declared that they would take their seats in the dining-room forthwith. Still Ames followed, and as the *maître d'hôtel* showed them to their side table, he lingered a moment with them until Mrs. Hurst, unable to do otherwise, suggested that he should sit with them, as he was alone. Ames readily complied, congratulating himself greatly on having gained a good strategical position.

Throughout the meal he was careful to maintain a calm and dignified demeanour, befitting a man of serious disposition, while at the same time he did his best to interest Elaine, who, to his surprise, was so well versed in politics that he was able to touch upon that topic with advantage. Elaine spoke clearly, without hesitation, and Ames perceived with satisfaction that she reasoned well.

"What strikes me always," she said presently, "is the waste of time in Parliament. While you are quarrelling over party trifles, really important questions, which affect the welfare of the people, are neglected or enormously delayed. Cannot politicians realise what their duty is?"

"If I may be permitted to allude to myself," Ames said, "I should like to say that I have hitherto done what little I could for the people's good."

"I know," she acquiesced, without, however, departing from her reserve, "for I remember reading your last speech. Do you intend to continue taking up such questions?"

"Most certainly, when opportunities present themselves. But Parliament is a place where the best intentions are too often balked."

"That I can quite well understand."

"But in the end, there is no doubt that justice must prevail, just as in the life of the world truth must ultimately triumph over falsity and calumny."

He had launched this dictum with deliberate design. It was time he took up arms against the lies which had been spread.

There was a silence for some moments; both the mother and the daughter looked down at their plates. Ames added:

"And I speak feelingly, for it has been my lot to be assailed by calumny. For some time I disregarded it; but now I have decided to defend myself. Pardon me from troubling you with this."

He looked so earnest and so wronged that the Hursts seemed inclined to be sympathetic. Mrs. Hurst said at length:

"For my part, as far as I am able, I make a rule of turning a deaf ear to calumny, and I am always sorry when I meet with it."

"That," said Ames, "is the attitude I take myself. But let us talk no more of such shortcomings on this delightful morning."

And he proceeded to relate to them an incident that had occurred a few days previously at Westminster. This amused them and the luncheon ended with a greater cordiality than had been shown at first.

Nevertheless, when they rose from the table, the ladies said, "Good-bye for the present," without any mention of their plans for the afternoon, and Ames, a little disconcerted, repaired to the smoking-room, where an elderly Frenchman, with an air of opulence, was talking somewhat loudly to a younger man, apparently untroubled by the presence of others in the room. As Ames was seated near them, he could not help, while smoking a cigarette, overhearing their conversation. The elder of the two was saying:

"To tell the truth, I am beginning to be tired of my island. It's a perfect paradise, and as you know, while there, I'm king; but the voyage takes too long, and really nothing compensates for the loss of Paris."

The younger asked:

"Then do you think of selling it?"

The answer was:

"Well, yes, if I can find a purchaser."

They talked of other things, but Ames' interest had been aroused and he determined to know more about this island. The idea of such a place as this to seek when tired of the life at home was certainly seductive. After finishing his cigarette he went into the hall, and stayed there for some time, wondering what he should do to advance his aims. The owner of the island passed him presently and he inquired of the hall porter who that gentleman might be. The man replied at once:

"That's Monsieur Roux, the coffee king."

Deciding that he would seek an opportunity to speak to Roux, Ames lingered in the hall a little longer, but at length, having told himself that if the

Hursts should find him there they might think him too importunate, he took his hat and left. He would no doubt meet his friends again.

Strolling round the town, he amused himself as best he could by looking at the shops and at the crowds of visitors who thronged the streets. Then he walked towards the Casino, where a concert was to be held that afternoon. As he was passing a hotel of somewhat modest aspect, Moore was in the act of leaving it.

"I wish to speak to you," Moore said at once.

"Very good," said Ames, and they moved away from the hotel door to the sea front, which was only a few hundred yards lower down the street. Then Moore commenced:

"In spite of what I told you not a week ago, you have followed the Hursts here."

"It seems to me," said Ames, "that you have done the same."

Without noticing this remark, Moore continued:

"If you think that you are going to triumph, as you did before, you're wrong, for I'm prepared to stop at nothing to prevent you."

"A threat?" Ames asked.

"You may interpret it in whatever way you please."

"After slander, intimidation. You're moving fast, my friend, upon a dangerous road."

"What do you mean by slander?"

"Do you imagine that I do not know who is the leader of the campaign of calumny against me?"

"I resent such an insinuation."

"Don't. My sources of information are too good.

It is, as I said before, unfortunate that we should both have thought of the same lady; but I am willing to abide by the choice she makes. If you are not, then we shall have to deal with you in the way most suited to people of your tendencies. I presume you do not mean to exhibit them before her."

"No. But fortunately we're in France."

"Yes, the land of 'satisfactions.' Go home and cool your head, Moore, you're in a bad condition."

Exasperated by this counsel, Moore said:

"I advise you to take care. This business may be a bit more serious than you appear to think."

"I don't ignore its gravity. Before I came I was prepared for it. But what would you have? One must take life as it is."

Saying this, he moved away from Moore, who stood some time looking after him.

Yes, thought Ames, as he walked along the front, the situation was by no means an enchanting one. This heated fool might be capable of much, and might spoil both their chances. Truly, this time he had need of all his skill.

When he reached the gate of the Casino, moved by a sudden inspiration, he took a ticket and went into the concert-room. He had only been there a few minutes when Elaine and her mother entered, taking a seat immediately in front of him, so that he was able to exchange a few words with them before the beginning of the performance and to enjoy the sight of Elaine while it was taking place. Yes, truly even to the outward eye, she was eminently fitted for the post he wished to offer her.

When the concert was over, he joined the ladies and walked with them on the promenade. Would they come for a country drive the next day? he asked. He had been told that the country was worth seeing, and it would make a change from the marine view. Mrs. Hurst accepted readily. Elaine, however, appeared somewhat reluctant, although she was of course obliged to acquiesce in the arrangement. They soon returned to their hotel, and saying they would meet at dinner, retired to their rooms.

A few hours later, as Ames was dressing, he said to Giacomo:

"In case I should, by any chance, be shot or otherwise destroyed while here, you'll take me to Kingslake as soon as possible."

Giacomo, who was in the act of folding a pair of trousers, stopped and raised his hands in mute astonishment.

"Yes," continued Ames; "I have a rival here for the hand of a young lady, and one can't be quite sure what he'll do."

"I know the gentleman," said Giacomo, with a look of quick intelligence. "I saw him on the cliffs this afternoon. He was walking fast and talking to himself."

"Poor man," said Ames, "he takes it tragically!" And for a moment he felt sorry for his rival whose mental equilibrium, it really seemed, was seriously disturbed. He did not think the danger which he ran was great, because he was seldom taken unawares, but it was just as well to look ahead. As Marcus Aurelius had once said, the life of any man was at the mercy of his slave.

When the dinner-bell sounded Ames went down to the hall. There he found the Hursts and Moore, who had been asked to dine with them. Ames, whose cover was laid at the Hursts' table, took his seat with them, and they made, as he said, a square. Moore spoke much and endeavoured to appear in the highest spirits, but it was evident to Ames that his exuberance was quite fictitious. For the rest, he was by no means a good conversationalist, and suffered in comparison with Ames, who now and then forced Elaine's approval by the cogency and truth of his remarks. Towards the end of the meal, Mrs. Hurst, to Ames' satisfaction, found an opportunity to say, in allusion to a scandalous report which had appeared in the morning's paper as to a statesman, that she was never influenced by rumours of that kind, which, in the majority of cases, proved to be unfounded.

Ames glanced at Moore as she said this, but Moore looked down. There was no doubt, Ames thought, that his cause was now in the ascendant.

After dinner the ladies, who did not go to the Casino in the evening, withdrew to the drawing-room. They were followed by Moore, but Ames excused himself, as a packet of letters had just arrived for him from London.

There was a letter from Sims, and he read it in the hall. His secretary informed him that he now possessed a clue to the reports. In regard to the "secret room," he had ascertained that the story had been spread by the Orientals who had danced that night for Ada's delectation. Distorted and magnified it had circulated in a shady set, whence had emanated, no doubt, the letter of blackmail. For all the other legends, one individual was primarily responsible. It was he who, in clubs where he met editors, at houses where he came in contact with political opponents, had persistently discredited his former friend. That man was Stephen Moore. He, Sims, had learnt all this from a friend of his, the secretary of a Tory lord; Ames shrugged his shoulders, opened a few more letters, and then went into the small *fumoir*, where he discovered Roux smoking a long cigar. Beginning a conversation with him about Dieppe, he told him that he had heard him speak, the previous day, about an island which was, he understood, for sale. At the same time, he gave his card to the coffee magnate and asked for some particulars. Roux willingly described the property and its locality. It was a fertile, healthful island of some twenty miles from end to end, and some fifteen miles from side to side. There was a population of about a thousand, peaceful and industrious. The owner of it was, to a large extent, an independent sovereign. It was a happy and peaceful spot. The price was two million francs.

Ames said:

"I shall go to see it as soon as I have time."

Returning to the drawing-room, a long room profusely gilded and lighted brilliantly, he crossed it to the place where the Hursts were sitting, followed by the glances of many English visitors who had already learnt his name. Mrs. Hurst was talking to an old French lady and Moore was speaking to Elaine. From the expression of the latter's face, Ames judged that whatever Moore had said had not been well received, and this view was confirmed when she made room for him on the sofa at her side, somewhat engagingly. Perceiving this, Moore suddenly became silent, but sat with his arms crossed and his eyes fixed on Ames, who related his interview with Roux, asking Elaine what she thought of his acquiring the island as a place where one might rest for a period each year and obtain a respite from the evils of civilisation. Elaine thought that the plan was good, but doubted whether the evils he alluded to might not be replaced by others equally distressful.

"You are right," said Ames, "for throughout history men have made afflictions for themselves, and there is not much reason to suppose that a retrograde society would be better than our own. But one might imagine that it was, and that would be consoling. In any case one might experiment."

"That, certainly," Elaine said, "would be interesting, and I almost wish that I had such experiments to make myself."

"If I acquire the island, I hope that you will come and make them."

Elaine smiled and they talked of other things. Moore answered her when she addressed him, but refrained from fresh remarks as though he wished, by his attitude, to show his strong distaste of Ames' society. The party, however, broke up at ten and Ames retired to his room.

The next day after breakfast, a landau drew up at the hotel door, and presently the Hursts and Ames drove off in it. As they were passing through the town, Mrs. Hurst said:

"Mr. Moore is not with us this afternoon. Might I ask if you are no longer friends?"

Ames' face grew grave.

"No," he answered, "we are no longer friends." There was a silence. The mother and daughter exchanged glances. Ames said at length: "Of his behaviour towards me I prefer to say nothing. For the rest, I believe he's in ill health."

"He certainly seemed strange at dinner," Mrs. Hurst said. "I conjectured something was amiss last night as you never appeared to address each other."

No more was said upon the subject, but there was an evident embarrassment which somewhat wore off, however, under the influence of the country scenes. Elaine confessed that she was fond of the sight of the fields and meadows, and her pleasure was indeed apparent.

At length they reached the village which was to be the limit of the drive, and after visiting the church, Mrs. Hurst returned to the carriage, while Elaine and Ames ascended an eminence whence a view of the adjacent country was to be obtained.

This, Ames thought, was an opportunity he must not lose. Accordingly, when they had reached the summit and had looked around, he said:

"Miss Hurst, I'm going to ask you a question, on your answer to which my happiness depends. Will you—will you be my wife?"

Elaine started as though she had been struck.

"Mr. Ames! Did you not know that I had no intention——"

"Of marrying? I guessed it. But that did not deter me, for I am convinced that if you persevered in that intention you would defeat more hopes than you would have the heart to crush. We need companions in this life, believe me. When I met you a year ago, you seemed to me upon a higher plane than I judged myself to be, or I would have said then what I am saying now, for from the first I recognised your qualities. But since that time I have found that my aims in life most surely coincide with yours, and I have thought that I might venture to offer myself to you as a sincere co-operator and a devoted husband. What is there that we might not accomplish, if united, for the good of others? I entreat you to reflect before you give me your decision."

She looked from one side to the other, as though she wanted to escape, but at length she said:

"Thank you, but I cannot give the answer you desire. I will only promise to reflect, but even now I realise that my answer must be no."

Ames said:

"If there is any other obstacle than that which I surmised, I beg of you to tell me what it is, so that I may at least be able to combat it."

"No, there is no other that is serious. Although I have not known you long, I am convinced that you are worthy of esteem."

Ames was disappointed. He would rather have had to oppose the rumours than this dislike to marriage.

"At least," he said after a pause, "will you not tell me if my chances are as great as Moore's?"

"Mr. Moore now knows that he has none."

Ames perceived a slight encouragement in this reply. Evidently Moore had tried his fortune that very morning and had failed. Doubtless he had been told so on the spot.

Nevertheless Ames was puzzled and the situation was embarrassing. He said as a last venture:

"It may be that you think my present act is premature, considering how recent is the loss I have sustained."

"I confess that I had some such feeling."

"My excuse is this. I feared that if I hesitated I might be forestalled."

He felt almost inclined to burst forth into entreaty in the style which women were supposed to like. But he refrained because he judged that, with Elaine, such methods would have no effect. This resistance on her part proved her worth and intensified his wish to wed her, since there were few women in the present day who would have evinced it, considering his wealth. At the same time, it was annoying, and might lead to complications. More than ever he was convinced that she was of sterling value, a woman upon whose good behaviour he could count. But she had notions in her head about celibacy and it was not impossible they might prevail against the racial spirit after all.

As she made no reply to his explanation he said:

"Let us talk no more of this to-day, but allow me to hope that you will try to think of me as worthy of your trust."

They descended the hill again and rejoined Mrs. Hurst who was wondering what had kept them so long up there, and Ames informed her that they had been seeing vistas of surpassing charm.

They returned to Dieppe, where Ames took leave of the ladies for the day upon arrival at the hotel, as he would, he said, be dining out that night. Then he retired to his room.

Giacomo followed him.

"Signor! I was in the town this afternoon and I saw him enter the shop of an armourer. I could not see what he bought, but when he came out he was carrying a little box. Thank God! the signor has returned in safety."

Ames grew serious. What was this man about to do? To suppress himself or him? Either would be disagreeable and something must be done to stop him.

Ames took an extreme decision. He left his room, and descended the stairs again. Then he made his way to Moore's hotel and inquired at the office if Moore was in. The proprietor despatched a waiter to ascertain. Some time elapsed before the man returned. Then he came and whispered something to the proprietor. The latter, who had been busy with his accounts, rose from his chair at once and approaching Ames said that he feared Mr. Moore was ill.

"In that case," said Ames, "as I am his friend, I will go to see him. Please send for the nearest doctor."

The proprietor bowed and, after doing as he had been requested, accompanied Ames upstairs.

In a small room on the third floor, which the proprietor unlocked, they found Moore lying, half undressed, upon his bed, with his head between two pillows, the upper one of which he was holding down. The floor was strewn with clothes and the mirror on the mantel had been badly broken. On the dressing-table was a revolver. Moore was groaning, and as they had entered noiselessly he had not heard them.

Ames walked to the end of the room, seized the weapon and unloaded its five chambers, while the hotel-keeper examined his broken glass. In the meantime Moore's legs moved convulsively and his right hand clutched the pillow with a nervous grip. Ames quickly realised the situation. Moore was going through a crisis. His nerves had broken down before he had brought himself to use the arm either against himself or against another and he was now plunged in an acute depression which had not yet reached the suicidal stage. He was clinging to life although he was very weary of its conditions and the result was a conflict which must sorely strain the brain and nerves. Suddenly Moore threw away the pillow and started up, but when he saw Ames and the proprietor standing near him, he sank again upon the bed.

"You here!" he muttered, and closed his eyes again.

Ames judged it better not to speak to him. He made a sign to the proprietor to that effect and they stood for some time waiting the arrival of the doctor.

When the latter came, the case was explained to him, for Moore refused to speak, and he soon confirmed Ames' conclusions. In the corridor, he told Ames that there was a complete breakdown. The excitement was excessive and it would be well that Moore should have someone with him for the next few days, after which he might go to recuperate in Switzerland. There was no doubt that he was and had long been neurasthenic. But the crisis was already passed.

"You will find that for the present his mind is in abeyance."

The doctor left after promising to send sedatives and Ames arranged with the proprietor for an attendant who would discreetly watch the patient. Before he left, he stood over Moore a moment, saying:

"Remember, Moore, that I'm your friend. We're friends now in misfortune."

Moore looked up a moment when he heard this, but immediately he dropped his head again upon the pillow, heaving a deep sigh. Then Ames left, after placing the revolver in the hands of the proprietor.

There was an end of that matter. Moore could be dealt with now and, although he did not love him, he knew that a man in his state could not be blamed in the ancient way, even for the calumnies which, in his disappointment and irritation, he had been the means of spreading. The same man, Moore, under prosperous conditions, would no doubt have been a normal individual, but the constant need of means to keep up the position which his birth had given him had brought him to this state. So that, as usual, one had to come to the conclusion that human destinies were dependent mainly on possession or on non-possession.

Ames dined that evening at a restaurant, and after a stroll upon the front returned to Moore's hotel, where he learnt from the proprietor that the patient had been put to bed and was sleeping soundly after the opiate which the doctor had prescribed. No doubt he would be better the next morning.

"To-morrow," Ames said, "I hope to bring him news that will go a long way to restore him."

The next morning Ames rose early, and as eight o'clock was striking he was at Moore's hotel. He found Moore still asleep. He awoke, however, presently, and looked at Ames with some timidity.

"You've come again," he said. "But, of course, you know, I'm all right now."

Ames said that he was glad to hear this, although he knew from Moore's drawn features that it was illusory.

"I heard what you said last night," Moore muttered. "Have *you* been rejected, too?"

Ames assented, but Moore shook his head.

"In the end you will succeed. I did think you were rich enough already without that."

"Without what?" Ames asked.

"Well, you must know that they have inherited."

But Ames confessed his ignorance. He said at length:

"Ah, well, one cannot help inheriting. You yourself may be an heir some day."

"Never," said Moore dejectedly. "There is no chance of that. My brother is about as poor as I and has a host of children. I am condemned to lead a stinted life or give up living. Indeed I feel half dead already."

"Yes, yes," said Ames, "you are depressed; but what would you say if your uncle gave you a respectable annuity?"

Moore tried to laugh.

"He's far too stingy, and he's somewhat pinched himself."

"Not so much, perhaps, as you suspect. I shall write to him and I feel confident the thing can be arranged. How old are you?"

"I'm thirty-six," Moore answered with alacrity.

Ames looked up at the ceiling, apparently engaged in a calculation.

"Six hundred a year, with what you have, would enable you to cut some figure in the world."

"Yes, it would relieve me from anxiety. It would indeed be an enormous boon."

"Very well then, I shall see to it. All you have to do now is to get well and take the train for Switzerland and climb the nerves away. To-morrow night I'll go with you as far as Paris."

Moore brightened visibly. He said:

"If you can arrange it *so that I accept it from my uncle, and from no one else,* I shall have to thank you greatly."

"Good-bye," said Ames, amused at the way in which Moore protected his self-love.

"I shall attend to the thing at once. In the meantime just keep quiet and I'll call in the afternoon."

Humming a tune, Ames left the place and returned to his room to write. Truly the balm of gold was wonderful! This helpless creature, unable to earn a living, and desiring ardently to live, had been partly cured by the prospect of a larger income. Well, he had been the means of introducing him to Elaine and that was worth a sacrifice. It would never do, of course, if there were many to indemnify in this way, for the robustest fortune would not stand the strain. But fortunately Moores were somewhat scarce and he might not meet another. Thinking thus, he wrote a letter to the uncle, explaining that in consequence of an indebtedness to Moore he wished to purchase an annuity for him which, for reasons to be ultimately explained, must ostensibly proceed from him (the uncle). Winston the solicitor, to whom he was writing, would arrange it all.

When he had written the two letters, he gave them to Giacomo to post with a sigh of relief. He was tired of Moore and vowed that if he caused him further trouble after this, he would deal with him in a very different way.

At the midday breakfast, he took his place as usual, though not without embarrassment, at the side table. He found the Hursts, as always, cordial; but he sought in vain, in Elaine's face, the trace of an encouragement. Surely she was not going to be obdurate. If so, that would delay his plans. But in the end must she not yield? Could women long resist the male attack? No, he did not think so. To ascertain the direction of the mind, he asked them if they would like, by chance, to make a Channel cruise, to Jersey or to Brittany? If so, he would have his yacht up from Southampton as soon as his captain had finished his honeymoon, in a few days' time. But as Mrs. Hurst declared that she was by no means a good sailor and declined his offer, thanking him, there was nothing to be done in that direction.

That afternoon the Hursts did not appear upon the front and Ames was inclined to take this as a bad omen. Perhaps, after all, this enterprise would fail and he would have to choose between celibacy and its opportunism or marriage with some spendthrift schemer, and he walked about taking interest in nothing and almost glad when it was time to go to Moore's hotel.

He found the neurasthenic somewhat better, though listless, lying on his back with his legs arched. He told him that he had written as he had promised. If Moore felt well enough, they would start for Paris the next morning as he was beginning to have had enough of Dieppe.

Moore said:

"I'm in your hands," and it was agreed that they would take the early train.

That evening Ames announced his departure the next morning, watching the effect the announcement had upon Elaine and perceiving only a slight expression of surprise upon her countenance. She asked however:

"Do you leave for good?"

And he replied:

"For no more than a day!"

Then he related Moore's indisposition briefly and somewhat superficially, omitting the dramatic incidents, saying that on hearing of it he had gone to see him and that they had not only become reconciled but had travelled as far as Paris in each other's company, and this explanation was accepted.

That evening he spent in his own room, but the next morning he started at eight, conducted his late enemy to Paris, put him in the train for Switzerland and took the night express to Dieppe. Moore had become clay in the potter's hands.

The next morning as Ames was leaving the hotel, he met Elaine who was about to join her mother on the beach.

"Back already!" she exclaimed, as they started off together.

"Do you think," he said, by way of answer, "that I could stay away an hour more than was imperative when my fate was in the balance?"

At this she became grave.

"I ought to tell you that it's just as I anticipated. I've thought and thought and yet I have not found it in me to say yes."

"At least you have not decided to say no. Take all the time you need, for could I ever want any one but you?"

They reached the place where Mrs. Hurst was sitting and no more was said, but for the next few days Ames applied himself with all his skill to conquering her shyness, telling her stories of his youth in Florence and the brave acts of his mother struggling against poverty to give him the education which had enabled him to hold his place in life; endeavouring by every means he knew to engage her interest and to make her think of him the best companion she could have.

At length a week passed thus, and although she became more friendly, yet there was no sign of her acceptance of his offer. At last he took decisive action. Going one morning to the post office, he telegraphed to Barnes to come at once to Dieppe. Then he announced to Elaine his intended cruise around the world. He wanted to give her full time to reflect, he said, when he found an opportunity, and he begged of her to give him leave to send a message from each port. She agreed to this and when the yacht arrived and she saw that he was really going, then she seemed to him regretful. Accompanied by her mother she witnessed his departure, and just before the vessel moved off from the pier she said, with a little smile:

"At least I promise that on your return you'll find me just as *disengaged* as now."

He stood long upon the bridge, waving his hat to her, convinced that his cause was good. As soon as the ship was well outside the harbour, he turned to Barnes:

"Now, Barnes, around the globe as fast as possible."

XV

In January, Ames returned. After a rapid voyage, *via* Suez, Bengal, Melbourne, staying a short time only in each port, and inspecting the island which he decided to acquire, the *Exe* reached Southampton, and Ames' first act was to take the train for London and to drive to Bayswater. He had not failed to cable to Elaine, giving her his impressions of things seen and expressing his hope that he was not forgotten. At the Cape he had received from her a few words of thanks and of encouragement.

He found her well disposed towards him on his arrival and finally, after a week's endeavours, he broke down her resistance.

The marriage took place in the spring and by it Ames, as he himself declared, was established on a solid, definite basis. The reports faded. Thenceforward his influence continued to grow steadily. He purchased two established journals and, in spite of the hostility of Constance, who eventually married Burleigh, he acquired weight in politics. In the House, he became a severe critic of the acts of ministers and a combatant for equity.

On one occasion he was offered a seat in the Cabinet itself. But he declined, preferring to exercise his influence untrammelled. Later the bait of title was held out to him. This also he refused and with his wife's approval. In the position which he had chosen for himself he was invulnerable, and he never ceased to feel his old distrust of the class which had despised him in the days of poverty. Some of the wealth he had acquired through his marriage with Ada was spent in charity, because he did not know its origin. The roving spirit became strong within him, and with or without his wife, who fulfilled his highest expectations, and who bore him children, he would roam about the world in search of new sensations, enjoying the illusion that humanity was better in distant latitudes where it was less intimately known to him, and passing months at times upon his Adriatic island, patriarchally. Life, he considered, was a boon, but he realised that it was far too great a burden for too many and he was quite prepared for a reapportionment of its advantages whenever the time came.

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